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STELLA BY FANNY LEWALD.

IN TWO VOLUMES.—VOL. I.

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STELLA.

BY

FANNY LEWALD.

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IN TWO VOLUMES.—VOL. I.

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TO
GEHEIMRATH PROF. DR. WINDSCHEID.

MY DEAR FRIEND.

Not long ago you and I were recalling the happy days of my first sojourn at Rome—with my dear lost husband and yourself.

Such reminiscences assure me beforehand of the interest you will feel in a work of fiction like mine, the scene of which is laid in and near the Papal Rome of 1845. How different from the Rome of to-day—the mistress of an Italian kingdom!

Allow me therefore to dedicate this book to you, in the hope, that it will sometimes remind you of happy days in the past, which we enjoyed together with many dear friends.

I remain yours, with reverence and affection,

FANNY LEWALD-STAHR.

BERLIN, *June* 1883.

S T E L L A .

CHAPTER I.

THE first time I was in Rome, in the year 1845, I boarded in the house of a respectable family, the head of which was employed in the Torlonian tobacco manufactories. The mistress and her daughters, whenever they could spare the time, came upstairs to chat with me. One day the eldest girl asked why the "Three" never visited me, as I counted so many artists and sculptors among my acquaintance.

I was at a loss to know what Marie meant. The Three? What did that mean? Who were the Three?

"You don't know who the Three are?" she exclaimed in much surprise, then as seriously as if she were speaking of the Holy Trinity, she added, "I mean the great Nilo, the Milordo and the Santo, the pale

Santo, who really isn't so pale after all. We only call him that because Nilo is so big and ruddy."

I asked what the Three did with themselves, and what their real names were.

"They are all painters. But I can't tell you what the two foreigners are called. It is impossible to remember their names, but we know all of them well enough. Il Santo, the only Roman among them, always stays here, and the other two, if they go away in the spring, are sure to come back. By this time they are in Rome again I expect," she added as she left me to go to her work.

The next day I inquired of one of my friends about the three. He laughed at my question. "I wonder you have not heard of them before," he said, "you will have to get used to that way of ours. The people here do not trouble themselves about pronouncing words that are not adapted to their mouths. Probably Marie had never heard these gentlemen's names. They call you here just whatever seems to them appropriate. They have always been addicted to soubriquets and nicknames, and many of the great Italian masters of the past, are known to us to-day by side-names or nick-names, such as Ghir-

landajo, Guercino, Tintoretto, Del Sarto, and so forth. After all it is infinitely better that they should dub us anything their ingenious fancy suggests, rather than mutilate our real names as other nations do, the French in particular. But you must get an introduction to the Trio, for they are all worth knowing. I daresay you have come across Adalbert's ideal landscapes in Germany. He is only three or four and thirty, yet the eldest of them. Wilfrid, who is a good deal younger, paints English and Italian every-day life, and Filippo Mai, the Pallido Santo, is in my opinion the only artist now living who succeeds in life-size religious pictures. The fact of his being a strict Catholic and a heart and soul believer may account for it. He has won a name for himself in Italy and has decidedly a great future before him."

This information had made me curious to meet the three artists. I had not long to wait, and I soon learnt that all their acquaintances and friends, among whom their genius received warm recognition, designated them as the Gran Nilo, the Milordo, and the Pallido Santo. And in close and friendly intercourse they called each other by these names; as for Nilo, the native wit of the models had

hit him off neatly enough with a nickname; for the hugely tall, broad-shouldered Adalbert with his dark brown wavy hair and curling beard, did really remind one forcibly of the antique river god in the Vatican.

Adalbert's birthplace was on the Rhine. When I met him at Rome, he was already a landscape painter not second in rank to Schirmer and Preller, but certainly he was very far from being the good husband and tender father of a family we met ten years later in Paris. Indeed he was then rather wild, and his muscular strength, his handsome person and his audacious delight in conquests made him the frequent subject of conversation not only among his artist comrades and his models. Wherever he went, he was noticed. The eyes of fair Roman ladies followed him from palace windows, and glanced at him from many a proudly rolling carriage, and it was said, although he never let a word fall from his full red lips on the subject, that he had found more favour in the sight of women and accepted more of their advances than was likely to increase his respect for the fair sex, or to be wholesome for either him or them.

The Milordo went his own way quietly and com-

posedly. He was born in one of England's fine old country houses, the only son of a wealthy landowner, and had been accustomed even in his childhood to ride over his father's wide-spreading acres, and to drive his mother through the woods and the deer-park of his fair inheritance. He had been educated as beseemed a youth of his position at a public school, had gone to one of the universities, and was studying for the bar when his father died and he came into possession of the property. His widowed mother had good reason to be proud of her son.

His slight figure, his finely cut features, his luxuriant fair hair gave him a refined and distinguished appearance. He was a good horseman, rode pluckily to hounds, and was a fair oarsman and swimmer. His whole bringing up and surroundings had been aristocratic and refined, and he gave promise of turning out a cultivated man of the world. He was thoroughly pure-minded and keen in perception, yet his turn for the ideal and his somewhat visionary disposition made him disinclined to put his talents and attainments to any practical use.

The owners of Harbury Hall, Wilfrid's ancestors had represented the same town in Parliament ever

since the foundation of the Whig party. But they did not belong to the nobility, neither had any of them ever held any important post in the government. They were thorough-going Protestants; Lady Jane was a stern matter-of-fact woman, and her political and religious views harmonized admirably with the family traditions. It was natural that she should expect her son to choose the same career as his fathers. However, the youth showed no inclination to fulfil these hopes, and this was the only fault she had to find with him. He had drawn to amuse himself as a child; and in that, as in other harmless pursuits, he had received every encouragement. He had taken lessons, and Lady Jane delighted in his rapid progress and decided talent as long as he painted for amusement. But when he took his first independent flight into the world after his father's death and went to Rome, he found out in what direction his talents and inclinations really lay. At Rome, he came to the conclusion that he was born an artist and not made to engage in party strife for the good of his country, although he clung with the deepest affection to his fatherland and his old Yorkshire home.

Instead of a few months, as Lady Jane had intended, he had stayed over a year in Italy and had since then divided his time with great regularity between Harbury Hall and Rome, between his mother and his art. He was resolved that, when it should be necessary, he would undertake the management of his estates himself, which was now in his mother's able hands, and, at the same time begin his political career, if that should be imperative. But he was equally resolved not to put any restraints on the freedom of his artist's life, as long as the seat in Parliament was held by the member of the family who at present occupied it.

Poor Filippo could not boast of such a happy past and such brilliant prospects.

One rainy February evening the sisters at the foundling hospital of San Spirito heard the bell sound at the grating, and found in the revolving basket, hung outside for the reception of abandoned children, a baby boy only a few days old. The child was bundled up in one of those gay Spanish shawls which since Napoleon's campaigns in Spain had been introduced into every European country by the Biscayans, and were to be seen in any town or village used as

table cloths, carpets and coverlets. To this shawl there was pinned a label on which was scrawled the following inscription: "He was given in private baptism the name Filippo, may the holy Church prove a mother to him! He will never be asked for."

The shawl and the label were Filippo's only possessions and his only dowry in the world when he left, first the foundling hospital, and afterwards the orphanage. Because he was obliged to have a surname as well as his baptismal name, and because the label had said he would never be asked for, they called him Filippo Mai; the word *mai* meaning "never" in Italian.

He was slightly built, not physically strong, but with great mental gifts and of a gentle, pious temperament. His teacher thought he would do for the priesthood, but he himself did not feel inclined for the spiritual calling. Fortunately the old apparatore who was employed to decorate the oratories for feast-days in San Spirito and the orphanage, took a fancy to the boy and expressed himself willing to adopt him. So they had made him over to Gianbattista, who was a skilful apparatore and a widower in the fifties: he said he wanted something young and lively about him, and, as the boy was intelligent, he would like to initiate him

in his business and art. His wife had died without blessing their wedlock with children; he found it dull at home, and the little orphan Lippo would bring a little brightness into the lonely house. Filippo was as pleased with the arrangement as his protectors: he enjoyed working in the churches in Rome and then perhaps for a week or so outside the walls; he tramped with his master from one quarter of the town to another and occasionally drove out on a wine-cart to the suburbs and villages, when the churches and chapels there had to be adorned for the feasts of the saints. He had always used his hands readily in the orphanage, and quickly learned of Gianbattista to manipulate the gold and silver lace and finely split straw so skilfully, that on a red or black ground the straw shone like real gold by candle-light; indeed he soon surpassed his master in imitating the patterns in the old mosaics and church books.

The priests, the curates, and the sacristans of the parish, were all fond of him, for he was a religious, thoughtful lad, who industriously went through his allotted paternosters and Ave Marias, and who trusted all the more in the heavenly Father and Saviour and his Holy Mother, because he had no earthly parents.

He had been told betimes that he was probably conceived in sin and born in shame, and that he must strive by his prayers and piety to save himself and those who had been so sinful as to give him birth from eternal damnation.

All this Filippo had heard from his earliest years; but he did not understand it, till long afterwards. He knew that he was alone and desolate in the world, *that* he understood well enough, and when his heart was very heavy, he would pour it out to the Blessed Mother; but she did not answer him, and that perplexed and disappointed him. He had no one to speak to in the evenings when Gianbattista went out to drink and he was obliged to stay at home. At last, to kill time, he took to drawing on the table or on paper the angels and the Saviour on the Cross, as he had seen them by day in the churches and chapels. The time went more quickly then, but nobody ever knew how he amused himself, for he always rubbed out what he had sketched on the table, afterwards, and hid the paper away. He felt so lonely, and like Gianbattista would gladly have had something young and alive to speak to, even if it had only been a dog or a kitten.

One evening when he was sitting meditating how he might get such a delightful possession, Gianbattista came in earlier than usual. Although it was not Sunday, he had been shaved and had had his hair cut. He threw his hat on the table and said,

“Lippo, you must take your bed into the back room, I am going to bring home a wife.”

“Very good,” replied Lippo, and was going off that moment to move his mattress when Gianbattista called him back. “Never mind for to-day,” he said, “she is not coming to-day: she won’t be here for a fortnight yet, my Cleofa! But to-morrow we will make up the mattress fresh and the mason must come and white-wash the walls.”

“Very good, Padrone,” Lippo said again, and this “very good” came from his heart; at first he had naturally supposed that the new wife would be elderly like her husband; but it now appeared that it was to be Cleofa, a fine comely woman only eight years older than himself. When he knew this he was still more pleased at the approaching marriage. Then, no doubt, the Padrone would go to drink in the evenings as he had done before, and the tinman’s Cleofa, who had been a friendly neigh-

bour and always had a kind word of greeting for Lippo, would be a much more amusing companion to shorten the time, than the dog or the cat he had wished for.

Thus a new life began in the little home when Cleofa came into it. Gianbattista, in spite of his three and fifty years, became quite merry and jocular. He let Cleofa manage everything: and he could trust her when he and Filippo were obliged to go out of Rome. She was a thoroughly honourable, good woman: and her father the old tinman watched over her when Gianbattista was away. Filippo got on famously with her. She knew how to command, and he had learnt to obey. Nothing escaped her keen eye, her quick hands kept everything in order and in the right place, and she was punctuality itself.

Then, on the expected day, the small creature came into the world to whom Cleofa's uncle, Padre Eusebio from the Cappuccini, a very learned and highly respected man, stood godfather. He had always been fond of Cleofa, his sister's daughter, and his pride in her was doubled when little Stella first saw the light on Three Kings' Day. He had often

come down from his monastery on the Piazza Barberini to the Piazza Rusticucci, where Gianbattista lived, to drink a cup of Cleofa's good coffee; and now he came oftener still to inquire for little Stella's health. For Padre Eusebio was a kindly, benevolent man, who rejoiced to see young people well and happily married, and took a lively interest in all children and young folks.

It was he who first discovered Filippo's talent for drawing and got the priest at Santa Maria Traspontina, to whom Gianbattista, his wife and Filippo went to confession, to prevail upon the apparatore to let his pupil attend the state school of art, where he could learn to paint religious pictures for the glory of God and the good of man.

Filippo's zeal and progress in his work re-paid both the Padre's trouble and Gianbattista's generosity, who had never charged him anything for his board. He made rapid strides in his art; as his Saints and Madonnas were soon talked about, and he began to earn money by his painting. People liked him and admired his melancholy, pensive young face, and soft dark eyes. Cleofa and her little Stella loved him dearly, and this made him so happy that he clung to them

with his whole heart, as if they really had been his own mother and sister. They sat as studies for his pictures, and he never wearied of painting them in every sort of position. He sometimes regretted that Stella was not a boy, for then with Gianbattista and his wife he would have had the whole Holy Family before him.

When Stella was about five years old and Filippo was thinking that he would paint her, following Titian's example, as the child Mary ascending the steps of the Temple, it suddenly struck him that Cleofa was changed and that she was really becoming every day more like the Holy Mother when she received the visit of St. Anne.

Filippo was then about twenty. Cleofa still allowed him to paint her in any character he pleased, but neither sitting to him nor at her work was she like her old self. She gave up laughing and singing, and told Filippo over and over again that he must take care of Stella if she died in childbirth; and when Gianbattista laughed at her for talking about dying, she shook her head and said she was sure death was very near. She had dreamed that she was to be taken from them, and the dream would come true.

It was of no avail for Padre Eusebio to try and talk her out of it, or for her father confessor Don Matteo at Santa Maria Traspontina, to attempt to dispel these gloomy presentiments, by setting her fresh rosaries and paternosters and telling her that her fancies were only caused by the state of her health. Everyday she became more and more sad and more tenderly anxious about Stella, and one morning, after the doctor and nurse had been with her all night, she lay white and dead with a dead child by her side, just as she had seen herself in her dream.

Once more then there was gloom in the little house. Gianbattista and Filippo however did what they could to keep things in order; and Cleofa's parents came sometimes to look into household matters, or took the child home with them, when Gianbattista and Filippo were away at work. So Stella grew up like a wild flower in rain and sunshine, without a mother's tender care. She knew that her mother had gone to the saints in paradise, and that she would go there too and live for ever in eternal bliss if she were good and pious all her life. But she was too young to realize her loss or to miss her mother much.

Every spring found her a good bit taller, and she

grew lovelier every day; she was cleverer and handier than any of the other children in the neighbourhood. Padre Eusebio took care that she should learn to read and write properly, while her grandmother taught her to turn her hand to cooking, dusting and mending as soon as she was old enough. Gianbattista, whose eyes were beginning to fail him, expected Stella and Filippo as a matter of course to help him in the evening with his preparations for the next church decoration. Both men were astonished and delighted at Stella's eye for colour, and at the way in which she could make the prettiest devices imaginable out of the most unpromising materials. Every odd and end of stuff grew into something ornamental and graceful under the touch of her deft fingers. She soon began to feel as if she could not live without bright colours and pretty things about her.

Without knowing it, she had gradually changed the whole appearance of the room she lived in. She had ornamented Filippo's sketches with scraps of velvet and gold lace, and covered the walls with them, so that the little room looked like a chapel in which she herself was the most beautiful picture, with her clear white skin and soft hazel-brown eyes, that looked out

full of joyousness and innocence, beneath the braids and small soft curls of dark hair which grew low on her square smooth brow. She rose in the morning full of strength and spirits, and sang to herself in low sweet tones as she lay down to sleep at night. She was so tall and strong that all labour seemed easy. It was a mere joke to her to carry the water from the well to the house; and she was always wanting water, for she liked everything she touched to be scrupulously clean. She would have everything about her nice and pretty. Her toilette was exemplary. The dark stuff bodice opening in front to the waist, displayed a chemisette trimmed with fine lace as spotless as her apron; the silver comb that fastened her long plaits together and her heavy gold earrings were so bright that you could see your face in them. She never forgot to adorn the little table at which she sat with her father and Filippo at meals. Even the little bed she slept in was hung with dainty draperies, and the picture of the holy Virgin which Filippo had painted for her, with her mother's face to watch over her at night, was never without flowers, or at least a branch or two of fresh green leaves.

So things had gone on as regularly as clockwork

month after month, year after year. Filippo had won for himself a name as an artist, and no longer painted in Gianbattista's workshop, but had a studio like other great painters in the Via Margutta, not far from the Piazza di Spagna in the quarter of the town where all the foreigners live. He could earn more than he really needed, for his tastes were simple, and he had acquired no extravagant habits. He still lived with Gianbattista, although he could have afforded to take a room over his studio; but he had not the heart to leave the old man and Stella. He had long since become fast friends with Nilo and Milordo, and they valued his friendship; but he had never brought either of them home with him, and very seldom spoke of his foster-father and Stella. This would have involved an explanation which he could not bring himself to make. Both Milordo and Nilo believed their friend was the old apparatore's son and that he possessed a most enviable model in his pretty young sister. This was all they knew, and Filippo thought it was enough.

They had never even seen Stella. Filippo had only taken her with him once or twice to the Via Margutta, when he wanted to put the finishing touches to some great picture too large to

bring home. She rarely went out otherwise except to mass and confession at Santa Maria Traspontina, with her grandmother. Sometimes her father took her on Sundays to the Piazza Barberini to see Padre Eusebio or to attend service at the Church of the Capuchins, and now and then she went to a festival at St. Peter's, which was quite near at hand, but this was the extent of her excursions.

The old man was now past his seventieth year and when he came home from his work he preferred not to go out again. When the cask was empty, which the wine-carrier brought him from Marino or Genzano, he sent to the nearest shop for his *foglietta* of good cabaret wine. According to the season he sat either by the lamp in the parlour, or outside in the yard under the shadow of the gourd and vine leaves that hung over the roof of the little arbour that he had built himself. Here he would enjoy the good things Stella prepared for his supper. There was no reason why he should not live comfortably, for he still earned fair wages and Filippo contributed his share to the household expenses. It was a pleasure to the young artist to do anything he could for the man who had fed him and brought him up without ever having grudged

what he gave him, and he liked to buy Stella dresses, corals and earrings, that she might set off her beauty to her heart's content.

One evening he came home with a little gold cross in his pocket for Stella, and found her sitting in the yard with her beautiful head bowed in her hands, despondently waiting for him and her father. He was surprised, for he was accustomed to see her always cheerful and bright. What could be making Stella sad?

CHAPTER II.

THE nearer Filippo came, the more plainly he saw the discontented expression on the lovely little face. He hoped she would brighten up at the sight of the cross, so he pulled it out of his pocket and said,

“Look, my Stella, look what I have got for you.” He held up the little ornament, and the yellow stone in the middle flashed merrily.

She glanced at it for a moment, and then, with a short “How beautiful,” let her head drop on her hands again.

“Why Stella, what is the matter? Why are not you pleased? What has happened?” he asked.

“Nothing has happened!”

“Are you ill, child?” he inquired more urgently, taking her hand as he spoke.

“No! no! How could I be ill?” she said, turning away from him petulantly. Then unable to control herself she added, her voice trembling, “Yes if you

must know, I am weary and sick to death, but not because anything has happened to me, but because *nothing* has happened or ever will happen! It is so dull! so dull! What is the good of your new cross or any of your pretty presents, if I am only to wear them here in the yard, where nobody ever sees me but father and you, or perhaps sometimes Nina and Chiaruccia, and the old people."

As she spoke, she had become more and more excited and now began to sob bitterly.

"But what made you begin to think of it to-day?" asked Filippo, who was as much astonished as he was distressed by her tears and lamentations.

"To-day? It has always been the same; not only to-day!" she replied. "I shall be sixteen on Holy Three Kings' day, and when I had turned fourteen and fifteen it was just as dull. I told my uncle so, and said I could not bear to hear the singing and laughter when the others came down from Monte Mario and the Vigne Verdi with the tambourines and castanets. I told the Father Confessor too. I could cry when the others are enjoying themselves and I sit here all alone."

"And what did the priest say?"

"What should he say? He said the Lord was trying

me as he had tried the saints in their childhood. I was only a child and I must pray as the saints did; but—”

“Go on!” Filippo urged; his heart was touched by her tears. “‘*But*’ what?”

She looked at him as if she wished to assure herself that she might confide in him, and then said firmly and decidedly, “I am *not* a saint! I have prayed yesterday and to-day too, but all the time the Saltarello and the Luisella were ringing in my ears. And then I saw it all as Nina described it, when I lay down to sleep. She told me how they shouted brava! brava! after she and Chiaruccia danced the Saltarello in the Vigne Verdi, and you have said yourself that no one dances it better than I do.—And I will tell you now, and if you like you may tell father too, that if I must sit here alone in the house waiting for you to come home and never do anything else, I would rather go into a cloister, as my uncle advised me to do the other day, when I complained to him and told him how dull it was here. There at least I shall not hear the others coming home after their fun, and I shall not be always wishing to go and dance with them, for then I shall know it to be impossible. I wonder if you’ll find

another who will cook for you, and do for you and sit and stand for your pictures as I have done."

She sat down at the table again and the tears rained down her cheeks. Filippo was deeply touched, and he blamed himself as well as Gianbattista for not sufficiently considering how young the child was, and how lonely it must be for her all day. If Cleofa had lived she would have had a very different life, and Cleofa had entrusted her to him and made him promise to take charge of her.

"But my little one! why have you never said anything before?" he asked gently, feeling ashamed of the neglect of which he told himself he was guilty.

"Because uncle and the priest both forbid me to do so; they said it was wrong to complain, and that I ought to be content with the state of life our Lord chose for me, before I was born. But if I am not content, how can I help it?"

She rose and went into the house. Filippo paced up and down the little yard.

He had seen how quickly she grew and how beautiful she had become. He had painted her as St. Cecilia and as the Virgin at the Annunciation. But never till to-day had she seemed so womanly, because before

to-day he had never thought of her as anything but the child he had known from babyhood. So, he thought, the Padrone and he had let it come to this! They had just treated her as their servant and never let her enjoy her young life. She was so unhappy that she would rather go into a cloister than bear it any longer. His Stella, his picture of beauty shut up between the walls of a nunnery! His peerless model lost to him for ever!—Impossible!

He hurried after her into the kitchen where Gianbattista was scolding his daughter angrily. The old man had come home from his work tired and hungry, and found the cloth not even laid on the table and no supper ready.

“Cristo! what has the little fool been doing?” he exclaimed. “Decking out her room again, as if the great Cardinal himself were going to hold a levee in it. But you are a fool too, Lippo! You put all kinds of nonsense into her head. You throw about money as if it were so much dirt. This evening you have brought her another trinket and she lets you starve for your pains, like—”

Filippo interrupted him. He never could allow Gianbattista, who was only too easily irritated, to find

fault with his daughter, and to-day it seemed more intolerable than usual.

“Be patient!” he said. “Don’t deprive her of the only pleasure she has got! Why shouldn’t she decorate her room? What else is she to do, when she is left alone in the house all day long while we are out. Sitting alone so much is not good for her, and she will mope herself to death. We must take her out more. She is discontented and no wonder”—and pleased with himself for having had the courage to speak up for his pretty Stella he went on. “You have no work to-morrow, so we will make holiday like the rest of them. Why not go out to Monte Mario in the Vigne Verdi for once; and let the child make herself smart as the other maidens do and enjoy herself. We’ll go to-morrow.”

“Enjoy herself indeed! All of a sudden she wants to enjoy herself, does she? She never thought of it before! You have put it into her head,” growled the old man.

In vain Filippo assured him that he had not done so; but Gianbattista would not listen. “Fifteen years old and hankering after enjoyment already. What is the child dreaming of? Thirty-eight years ago when

I married Peppina she was four and twenty, and had not thought of such things; and Cleofa was twenty-three before Stella was born. I wonder what she would say if she could know that Stella at fifteen wished to be gadding about after pleasure and to leave her honest old father. Why did I marry Cleofa, and what did I want with a daughter unless it was to have my house kept tidy, and comfortable, and someone to be a stay and help to me in my old age? As the mother, bless her soul, has been taken, the daughter must stay, and fill her place.—Enjoy herself indeed! She may want pleasure, but I want comfort, and will have it too, so basta! She belongs to me, and to no one else! Remember that!”

“Who in heaven’s name said that Stella wished to marry?” interposed Filippo wishing to conciliate the old man, and stop his unjust reproaches. “She would only like to go out now and then, and show her pretty clothes, and get a little admiration, perhaps dance and sing sometimes as Nina does, and as it is only natural such young things should dance and sing. There is no crime in that, surely. You know, you were young once!”

“What crime? Who spoke of crime! To marry a

husband is no crime either! And if Cleofa were alive she should marry,—but not now.—No! no! not unless the husband came and lived here too,” he added significantly. “You say,” he continued in sharp scolding tones, “that she never thought of marrying. Why does she want to dance and be admired then if it isn’t to get a husband the easier and quicker.—As to you!—Your friends call you *Il Santo*, you say. That may be all very well for you and your friends, but don’t play the saint to me.—You know as well as I do what a woman is after when she goes out to enjoy herself and to be admired! It won’t be to your advantage either, Lippo, if another carries her off, mind that.” Thus the selfish old man flattered himself that he was enlisting a supporter who would never fail him.

“That’s enough!” said Filippo. He had gradually gained a certain authority over his old protector, by his patient consideration for him, and the large sum he gave towards the housekeeping. “She is coming, so pray be silent, and don’t accuse her of thinking of things that she never had in her mind. I may as well tell you that Padre Eusebio is trying to persuade her to go into a convent, and she may be driven to it from sheer dulness. What would you say to that?”

“Convent!” cried the old man. “Is Eusebio mad? He shall never cross this threshold again!”

“Say no more then,” entreated Filippo, “but let me have my way. No harm will come of it! She is a good, industrious girl, and deserves a treat, and you yourself would enjoy it too. Nilo was out there yesterday, and said that there never had been better wine than this year.”

“All that way in this heat! In August the sun was not hotter than it is now? And up hill too!” objected Gianbattista, who was, however, beginning to relent.

“Who said you must walk? If it is warm we will drive! To-morrow I will entertain you and be Padrone! We’ll engage a carriage at the corner here, and Stella shall dance holes in her shoes if she likes.”

She only caught the last words, and her whole face beamed when she noticed her father made no objections. But she could not trust herself yet to ask any questions.

She went quickly backwards and forwards between the house and the harbour, spread the snowy cloth on the table as neatly and carefully as the old man laid the altar cloth on the high altar.—Plates, glasses, the

oil-jar and vinegar bottle, and the antique salt cellar were quickly arranged in their places. She hurried into the house with light, quick steps, and brought out the knives and forks in her apron she had forgotten, then placed the steaming dish of macaroni dressed with mushrooms on the table.

“Look!” she laughed, “to-day we are going to have real *strozzi prête!* Nobody in Rome, not a prince nor the Holy Father himself could wish for better! Now make haste and begin or it will get cold!”

She cast down her eyes, but in spite of the drooping lids little smiles of joy and delight played round her lovely lips and hovered about the dimple in her cheek. She heaped up her father’s plate, till it could hold no more, and then did the same to Filippo’s, and as she handed it to him, she said: “What time will you come with the carriage, my Lippo! For I heard you say we were to drive. Isn’t it true, my Santo, that we are going to the Vigne Verdi, where Nina went yesterday and danced with Milordo and Nilo, and where they are going again to-morrow? It is time that I went too, is it not?” She cast an anxious side-long look at Giambattista. “It is really too bad! Everybody knows your friends, only I have never seen them.”

She filled their glasses without being asked, mixed the salad, and did everything she could to show her gratitude for the pleasure she believed was to be granted her at last. She ate little herself, and directly she had cleared away the things, she came out with her guitar to play to her father and Filippo, who were both musical, and liked to hear her sing and play.

She broke off suddenly in the middle of the first two or three chords, and with a tone and look that were characteristic of the childlike freshness of her nature, she cried: "No! I can't sing this evening. I am too happy! Lippo, you shall play, and I will dance!"

She had often asked him to play for her before when she was a child; to-day it touched him, he did not know why, and his heart thumped with wild delight as he played the Saltarello and watched her rhythmical movements, till at last he could hardly contain himself for happiness.

The Padrone, smoking his pipe, watched her silently, and then rose and walked towards the house.

"To-morrow, father!" she called, stopping in the middle of her dance.

“Yes, to-morrow,” Filippo said reassuringly, “to-morrow we will go pleasure-seeking.”

“What will your uncle say?” grumbled Gianbattista, who still could not reconcile himself to the proposal. “We ought to ask him, or what will he say if we don’t?”

Stella ran up to him laughing and, putting her face close to his, said, “I know what he will say, he will shake his head like this and mutter, ‘mondo! mondo! such is life!’ But let him mutter. What does it matter! you are my father, not he, are you not, you old dear? I should hope you were master in your own house, and you always say that a man ought to be lord of his own family!”

He shook her off irritably. But his heart was softened towards her all the same. Stella’s clever sallies and pretty ways had captivated him. “Very well then, we’ll go to-morrow!” he said and went into the house.

Stella flew back to Filippo, and throwing her arms round his neck kissed him, as she had never done since she was quite a little child. “Thank you a thousand times!” she cried, “you are the best Lippo in the world!” He pressed her closely to him, and

she kissed him again, then ran swiftly away to her room.

He sat there a long time lost in thought. Her kiss burned into his very blood, and he almost repented the promise he had made to this pure, and gracious creature.

CHAPTER III.

In those days the October festivities were scenes of lighthearted, joyous gaiety. Crowds of stately men, tall, comely matrons, athletic youths and slender, supple maidens came from the Trastevere, the Lungara, and the Hills of Rome to spend the warm afternoons in the *osterie* outside the gates of the city, chatting and dancing and drinking the pure light wine! It was often not till late that they thronged homeward again, and far into the night the streets echoed with the music of the flutes, guitars and mandolines to which they sang their popular ballads.

The colourless cotton dress now worn in Rome, was not so general then. The Roman people were still to be seen in the becoming costume of their country, in which they always looked so picturesque. It was a good time for the artists who had only to use their eyes, to find a subject for a picture. In the

every-day life of the people out of doors, every imaginable type offered itself to the painter with a direct simplicity beyond the power of the most practised model, from the Virgin with a spiritual smile on her lips and the Holy Child at her breast, to the wild bacchante in the mad excitement of riotous merry-making. Wherever the people met together in large gatherings, artists were never missing, least of all at the October festivities.

Nilo and Milordo had reached the Monte Mario early, and had emptied many a glass and treated their models and acquaintances among the citizens to many a *foglietta*, when they began to think of Filippo. The day before, when he parted from them in the Café Greco he had promised to join them, and they wondered why he did not appear.

“Ninetta!” said Nilo to the daughter of the man who made his frames. He worked for Milordo and Santo too, and brought his Nina sometimes to their studios to stand for an hour or two, and saw that she was well paid for the trouble. “Ninetta! do you know what Santo is going to do this afternoon, that he hasn’t turned up.”

Nina nodded her head energetically and grinned

till both rows of her white teeth were visible between her full red lips, and the silver pins quivered in her black hair.

"I should think I did know," she said. "A miracle has happened, and I," she lifted her eyebrows, "I am the saint that has worked it. They are both coming out to-day, Gianbattista as well as the Santo, and they are going to bring Stella with them."

"Lippo's sister?" asked Milordo.

"What are you saying about sisters?" chimed in Chiaruccia, who was standing near. She was one of the favourite costume-models in Rome. Her figure was tall and round and she had the stately carriage of the true Roman maiden. "Lippo's sister?" she repeated with her natural pertness. "How should he get a sister? The Santo has neither father nor mother. He was a poor child from San Spirito. He says that Stella is his sister, because he has always lived with Gianbattista and wants to keep Stella all to himself. Everyone knows that. But he is very good to Gianbattista and to Stella too. I met her this morning early at the baker's. It seems she lost her temper yesterday, and told them she wouldn't be shut up like a hermit any longer. And they have come to their senses at last,

and are going to bring her here to-day. She was at the door, all ready when we passed by."

"Look, there they are coming! In a carriage too!" exclaimed Nina. "Ah, San Lippo does things in style! But he can afford it. He got a lot of money from the Milanese Count for his St. Francis. And he paid my father sixty scudi for the frame with the big coat-of-arms which was a beauty. A real beauty. You have seen it?"

Adalbert and Wilfrid did not say whether they had seen the frame or not. They were so taken up in watching their friend's arrival, that they had not paid much attention to Nina's chatter. Stella's extraordinary beauty struck them dumb.

As lightly as a feather she jumped out of the little vehicle before her father and Lippo, artlessly exposing her arched foot and shapely leg and ankle, then spying Nina she ran up to her, swinging the tambourine over her head like a child.

"Here I am!" she cried as Nina rose from the table at which she had been sitting, to meet her. "Did you see us, Nina? and you Chiaruccia, in the carriage? Oh dear! how lovely it is here, and such heaps of people! How beautiful!"

"How beautiful *you* are!" said Adalbert involuntarily, who was standing close to Nina with Wilfrid.

Stella started, then turned her great brown eyes on the tall speaker, and looked at him and Wilfrid with the frank upward gaze that they had always so much admired in Filippo's pictures.

Wilfrid watched her in silence. Poor Stella was embarrassed, and did not know what to say next. But clever Chiaruccia came to her help. "You must excuse the child," she laughed. "She never sees anyone and she is only just fourteen!"

"Fourteen!" broke in Stella, afraid that her friend wished to make her out a baby. "That's not true. I was fifteen last Holy Three Kings' day, and on the next I shall be sixteen. You can ask father and the Santo!"

"A fine saint!" jested Adalbert, slapping his comrade on the shoulder, who meanwhile had paid the driver and now approached the little party with Gianbattista. "A fine saint with this lovely girl in his possession! How he has taken us in, Wilfrid! He must have laughed in his sleeve at our believing so implicitly that his fair model was his sister! But take

care, Lippo, our little Chiaruccia here has enlightened us!"

Wilfrid had not taken the hand Filippo offered him as usual at meeting. He was fond of him and had always trusted him more than he had the wild pleasure-loving Adalbert; and he was hurt at being as he thought wilfully deceived.

Filippo's face darkened. He knitted his thick eye-brows so closely, that his deep-set lustrous eyes were almost hidden under them. In a moment he saw the situation clearly. All that was dear to him, the esteem and confidence of his friends, Stella's good name were at stake. He felt that he had made a mistake in not speaking of his peculiar circumstances to his friends and in allowing them to be misled by the appearance things had worn; then collecting himself, he said: "You are right; we are not related. But in your suspicions you are unjust both to Stella and me. Don't wrong her. This is the first time she has been out here, and I want her to enjoy herself. To-morrow I will explain matters. Think of her as my sister still, for as such I love her and she has all her life looked on me as a brother." As he spoke the colour mounted to his brow, for he knew that since yesterday

a love had glowed within him very different from a brother's love for a sister, and that he was deceiving his friends, as up to now he had deceived himself.

They shook hands and the subject was dropped for that evening. Adalbert, in his usual extravagant manner, proceeded to extol Stella's charms; and Wilfrid, who could not take his eyes off her, quietly remarked that she was the loveliest, most graceful creature he had ever seen. She herself in her great delight did not notice what was said. Neither did she seem aware that she far outshone the other pretty girls around her, and that amidst all this youth and beauty she attracted the eyes of almost every man towards her. As she talked with the young artists, she did not realize that she was associating with men who were foreigners and far above her in rank. The novelty of all around her made her quite unmindful of any such considerations.

"So you are Stella," Adalbert said. "We ought to have known that, even if Lippo hadn't been with you, for we have so often seen your picture, as he has painted it for good Christians' devotions; and just as the holy Virgin must have been more beautiful than anything the hand of man can paint, so are you more

beautiful than all the studies Lippo ever made of you. And that you may believe it, I won't pray to his pictures any more, but worship you instead, now I have seen you and know you!"

"Oh, Signore!" exclaimed Stella without heeding his flattery, "you don't think I don't know you too! you are the gran Nilo! Lippo has got your picture!"

"Where?" inquired Adalbert smiling.

"In his studio! And I know you paint large landscapes with people in them, some of them with clothes on, and others naked, but very beautiful! Lippo has one of them too."

"And who am I?" interposed Wilfrid.

She glanced at him full of friendly interest, then cast down her eyes before his long, earnest gaze. "Ah!" she said turning to Adalbert again, "that is the Milordo, isn't it? Why does he always paint ugly old women and dirty little boys?"

She was thinking of a sketch of his she had found in one of Filippo's portfolios. Her ingenuous little confidences were irresistible.

"I don't always paint old women and dirty boys," Wilfrid informed her. "I paint beauty too. But I

am not like Filippo, who has always got you to paint. You, Stella, are the model I would choose before all others!"

"Then paint me, sir! I have more pretty dresses at home, and lots of beautiful neckerchiefs and aprons and ear-rings," she said assuringly.

This was too much for Gianbattista. "What!" he burst out. "How dare you! you ought to be ashamed of yourself. My daughter offering herself as a model. Letting herself out on hire in a public place like this! But, gentlemen, please remember she is only a child and doesn't know what she is talking about, little fool!" Then he turned on Filippo and grunted: "This is what comes of it, you see! I was right when I said it would end in something besides enjoyment. Catch me letting her go outside my doors again!"

Stella looked at her father and Filippo with big frightened eyes. "What can he mean?" she asked, "have I done anything wrong? This is the Milordo, father, Lippo's great friend! You know I would do anything for Lippo and his friends! Besides, Nina's father took her to Nilo's studio to be painted, and——"

"And that is nothing to be ashamed of," Nina

broke in. "I am an honest, respectable girl and you know it, Gianbattista, as well as the Santo. There is my mother sitting over there, and my father, and my brother Lorenzo too. I will call Lorenzo and he shall tell you whether I have anything to be ashamed of. If Lippo had as little reason to be ashamed——"

"What have you and Lippo to do with it?" Gianbattista said, cutting her short. "You may do as you please, it is no concern of mine. But I won't have Stella hired as a model, no, not if a king or an emperor wished to paint her. I won't be trifled with, and my daughter shall do as I bid her."

Wilfrid and Filippo, who had quite lost his composure, tried their best to make peace between the old man and Nina, before the latter's father or brother struck into the dispute and, heated with wine, began a senseless quarrel. But Adalbert with his usual good nature put an end to the unfortunate affair.

"I say, Gianbattista, have you come out here on purpose to spoil the fun?" he said. "You and the Santo had better have stayed at home with your Stella if you object to my hopping round with her in

my German fashion. I should like anyone just to try and take her away from me, when once I had my arm round her. But if you won't have that—well then—Forwards, Ninetta! Lead off with Santo's enchanted lady. Go on. Take your tambourines, I will play for you!"

So saying, he slung the mandoline round his neck, which he played with masterly skill, and led the girls forwards from the table. Glad that the threatened quarrel was averted, they both took their places right merrily for the Saltarello.

The sweet notes of the dance began to tremble through the air, and all eyes were at once directed to the two beautiful children. Gianbattista still grumbling sat down to a new *foglietta* of the clear red wine of Marino; scarcely had the girls completed the opening steps opposite each other and crossed each other in an undulating curve, before shouts of applause greeted them from every side. Nina was noted for the marvellous rapidity of her dancing, the elasticity with which she always seemed to be able to describe a new and unexpected circle, and the skilful way in which she seemed suddenly to draw her partner towards her; but to-day, Stella's quiet grace as

she danced, put Nina, who was generally so rapturously admired, quite into the shade.

Stella seemed entirely unconscious of being watched or admired. At first she danced so slowly that Adalbert involuntarily slackened the time. She moved smoothly to and fro to the sound of the music just as the humour took her, like the solitary swan making its deliberate circles in the water. There was a touch of roguish playfulness in the manner she had, of first approaching close to her companion and then avoiding her. When she glided past Nina she looked back at her, bending from the waist, as if to give her a chance of catching her; then the next moment she would beat the tambourine, in exultation at her escape, and shake it in the air, displaying the beautiful curve of her arm and wrist. The ever increasing liveliness of her companion's dancing at last infected Stella, and her movements became more passionate and animated. Her eyes sparkled, and the soft little curls on her forehead played in the breeze. Quicker and quicker the lovely girls flew past each other, louder and wilder sounded Adalbert's mandoline and the bravos of the spectators, till the two threw themselves breathless and laugh-

ing on the bench on either side of Adalbert, who handed them glasses of red Marino wine as a reward for their exertions.

Incited by this enthusiasm thus called forth fresh pairs stood up to dance, anxious to show their skill and to emulate the others. Many of them were beautiful too, and all of them had exquisite figures; the vivacious and brilliant Chiaruccia was one of them. They all danced their best. They too were accompanied with *ritornelle*, and their admirers and wooers were not behind-hand with encouraging exclamations and loud applause; but there was not the unanimous transport of delight which Nina and Stella had excited. Yet this caused no heartburnings or jealousies; every face wore an expression of unclouded happiness and joyous excitement. The foreign artists sang songs in their own languages, and both natives and foreigners vied with each other in their exuberant mirth, and even those who were not beautiful, and those who could not dance so well, joined heart and soul in the fun. The laughter and noise became quite deafening when some of the young men stood up to dance with each other, among them handsome young Marco from the Palazzo Rocca-

forte, who was sometimes Gianbattista's companion in his various employments. But at last the best of the evening was over, and the artists one by one retired from the ranks of the dancers.

"Now, do you know what I mean by dancing genii and divine bacchantes, who must dance because it is their second nature?" asked Adalbert with gleaming eyes. "Do you understand now the reality of the glorious rhythm of the figures in the vase-reliefs in the Albani?"—He himself only wanted a wreath of vine-leaves on his curly head to be the Bacchus among the army of bacchantes of whom he spoke with such admiration. "Now you know what real beauty is, I hope?" he repeated, tossing aside the mandoline which he had been playing to the dancing of two tall, well-made young fellows. "I had dreamed of such beauty before, but what is the dream compared with the reality? By Bacchus, it repays one for the trouble of living!"

"I certainly have never seen anything to equal Stella," Wilfrid said, "every feature is perfect, every movement full of grace. There is such innocence and purity about her that one could fancy her rising like Anadyomene, new-born out of the water. She looks

at you like Raphael's Eve in the Loggie. A child, and yet such a perfect woman. She is indeed one of Nature's masterpieces!"—He had intended the last part of his speech for Filippo, but he had disappeared. The whole evening he had been more retiring and thoughtful than usual, holding but little conversation with any one.

"Her beauty drives me simply wild!" exclaimed Adalbert, smoothing back the damp curls from his heated brow.

"She has not that effect on me," replied Wilfrid. "To me there is something sacred in the heavenly expression of her eyes, and in her harmonious, finished loveliness. She is all proportion and grace. Look at her now, sitting over there. How proudly she lifts her head! What an innate nobleness there is about her as she converses with those two boys, Nina's brother and that huge fellow Marco! A king's daughter giving audience could not look more queenly!"

"I don't want her to give me audience! I would rather have something a little more familiar," said Adalbert contemptuously, "for woman is woman, whether she has a crown or a silver comb on her head.—To

think of the hypocritical Santo's, having kept all this loveliness to himself!"

"Hush, there he is!" said Wilfrid. And the conversation took another turn.

Meanwhile Stella was chatting and laughing and amusing herself in her innocent childish way. But she kept close to her father's side, and had looked round anxiously for Filippo several times, before he returned at last to remind them it was nearly time to be making their way homewards.

Then the artists flocked round Stella to praise her, and she graciously accepted their homage, as is the custom among Roman maidens. She said frankly that she was glad they thought her so beautiful. Her mother, who had made her so, had been beautiful too. And if they thought her prettier than Filippo's pictures, it was because she always sat so stiffly and rigidly before the easel and got tired from ennui. But she didn't mind doing it for Filippo, because he was kind and good. Only yesterday he brought her the pretty gold cross she wore round her neck, and Padre Eusebio from the Cappuccini said it was a good thing to be a model for such grand sacred pictures.

She exhibited the little cross on her bosom with

unconcealed pride, little thinking that the men admired her neck a great deal more than her gold cross, and that they only handled it as an excuse for touching her.

Adalbert, who scarcely moved from her side, whispered that if she would let him paint her he would give her better things than a gold cross.

She shrugged her shoulders. "I would let you do it, if it pleased Filippo. But, you see, neither he nor father would allow it."

"I am sorry for that," Adalbert said.

"Why?" she asked.

"Because," he said in a low tone, "I should like to paint you as Venus."

A light came into her eyes. Was Nilo in earnest? To be painted as Venus is not only the ambition of models. Beauties with noble Roman blood in their veins, often long for the honour. And it is said that they have not seldom defied custom and honour, and made a sacrifice of their position and good name, to be handed down to posterity as an artist's ideal.—Stella, although she did not know this and was quite ignorant of the old classical world, had learnt from Filippo that Venus was the most beautiful creature that had ever

been made, more beautiful even than the Madonna; so beautiful that they painted her without clothes, and the original must be a most fair and exquisite being.

“Don’t talk to her like that,” entreated Wilfrid, who had heard what Adalbert said. He spoke in English.

But Adalbert was not inclined to obey the request. “What do you think?” he exclaimed laughing, “Milordo doesn’t believe it!”

“What doesn’t he believe?” asked Stella, confused and excited.

“He doesn’t believe you are beautiful enough for Venus.”

A shadow passed over her bright face. “Ah, Signore!” she exclaimed with a little sigh of regret, as if she were surprised and sorry at his not admiring her.

Wilfrid caught her hand and, enchanted with her beauty, gazed tenderly into her eyes. “Nilo is mistaken,” he said. “You are far too lovely for a Venus. There are others who do for that! You stick to Santo’s holy characters! Your Creator never meant you to be painted as Venus!”

“Thank you, Signore!” she said. “Thank you!” But what Wilfrid told her made her low-spirited, and when he let go her hand she went to her father and sat down beside him without a word.

Somehow or other her pleasure was spoilt, and she was glad when the festa was over and the evening came to an end.

CHAPTER IV.

THEY descended Monte Mario to the sounds of flutes and mandolines, singing the Luisella, which at that time was the newest and favourite song of the people. In jocund companies they trooped through the Porta Angelica. As they dropped the maidens one by one at their doors they all halted to bid farewell. The longest pause was before Gianbattista's house, which stood out clearly in the silvery moonlight. There they shouted *vivas* for the lovely Stella till they were hoarse, and, to wind up, the Germans of the party sang one of their beautiful quartets which brought people running to listen from all directions. And the old obelisk heard it in amazement, and thought, that all the centuries it had stood in St. Peter's square, there had never been such a magic blending of fountain splashes, German songs and soft pale moonbeams.

Then they went on into the city over the Ponte S. Angelo, and the singing and laughing lasted till

long past midnight; so that the old people who had stayed at home having no longer any sympathy with the frolics of the young, awoke from their slumbers and grumbled that they could not get to sleep again.

Meanwhile it had all become quiet and still in the Piazza Rusticucci. But in Gianbattista's little house he was the only one who thought of repose. He had drunk his full share of the new wine and had afterwards spoken his mind pretty freely to Filippo and Stella. He swore by all the saints, that, as long as he was master in his own house, he would never go out pleasuring again, but keep to his old ways. He now composed himself to sleep the sleep of the just, which had never deserted the honest, industrious toiler in his old age.

Neither Filippo nor Stella went to bed. She had to get everything ready for the next morning. Her father wanted to be off early, for he was going outside the town to decorate a chapel for the feast of St. Maria del Rosario, and Marco was to accompany him.

Marco was a strong, handsome youth a little over twenty. He was the priest Don Matteo's nephew, and was as much at home as Matteo himself on the Prince Roccaforte Anciesella's estate, in the Romagna. The

father of the present Prince had educated Matteo and afterwards made him his private chaplain; and after the Prince's death he had remained in the family as long as the Princess Agatha lived; then Prince Salvatore's influence obtained for him the benefice of Santa Maria Traspontina. True, it was only a small Church, and not one of those famous edifices which foreigners flock to see; but it had large indulgences, the priest was a learned, strictly moral man, who, through his long and close connection with the princely house, had acquired refined and cultivated tastes, and through his tact and spiritual advice, understood how to control the passions of his illustrious patrons. Thus it was that he came to be the father confessor of many of the distinguished inhabitants of the palaces on the Borgo and the Lungara. And it was well known, that his impressive eloquence and persuasive arguments had brought the present beautiful Princess Roccaforte, who was an Englishwoman, into the only true and saving church. His fervent zeal had attracted general attention. He was well thought of in the Vatican, and as he came into contact with celebrities and magnates, at the Palace Roccaforte and other residences of the nobility, more than was commonly the

case with the priest of a small Church, he was looked up to, and respected by the bourgeois and tradespeople in his parish. In addition to this he stood high in the esteem of the venerable General of the Capuchins, Cardinal Miccara, who enjoyed one of the most honourable reputations in all Rome. Altogether he was a man of influence in his parish, who only had to give his gentle, modest commands, to be instantly obeyed. In spite of the luxury he was accustomed to in the grand houses he frequented, he lived at home as simply and abstemiously as his great pattern, the General of the Capuchins. No one could accuse him of the least excess, and his old house-keeper pronounced him a truly pure and holy man. He had only one weakness and that was his great and almost blind devotion to the son of his only sister, who had died young, leaving her child entirely to his uncle's care.

If his uncle could have settled the matter, Marco would have entered the profession in which he himself had found so much happiness, but the young man was quite otherwise inclined. He was a marvel of physical strength, with gifts which might be turned to good or bad account. One thing

was certain, he was incapable of sticking to anything. One day he tried this, another day something else, but it was always the same story, he could not give his mind to his work whatever it might be. He had got into scrapes at the Cloister school where Don Matteo had at first placed him, and had to be removed. Then, boylike, he longed to be a soldier or to go to sea, but his uncle could not make up his mind to part with him. In fact Don Matteo, who knew how to comfort, guide, and advise young and old, high and low in his parish, was at a loss how to deal with his own nephew.

At last he had thought him happily settled when one of his penitents, the beautiful Countess Lucrezia Foscaldi, procured him a post on her estates, where he would have plenty of driving, riding and change of scene, and not very much to do. Here, wonderful, to relate, he did stay two years. Then the great rebellion in the Romagna broke out; and one evening after dark when the old housekeeper was out, Marco appeared in his uncle's study, wrapped in a heavy cloak; and a little later the two left together for the monastery of the Capuchins.

No one in the priest's house or neighbourhood

knew this at the time. It was not till eight months later that it was rumoured Marco had gone into a cloister, and while people were still wondering what had driven him to it, the news came that Marco had decided not to take the vows after all, as he did not feel fit for the spiritual calling, and that Don Matteo had obtained for him a temporary place in the Prince Roccaforte's service.

How all this hung together no one exactly knew. But in spite of the firm belief that whatever Don Matteo did, must be right, many put their own interpretations on the affair. It seemed that Marco had entered the cloister just when the rebellion had collapsed, when the Banieras were executed at Naples, and so many young noblemen and students with all their followers were tried and condemned to death or the galleys, only those who had provided themselves with passports managing to escape over the border.

As for Marco he had done wisely enough in taking refuge with his uncle in Rome, who had kept him out of sight till the awful hand of justice restored order in the Romagna, and peace reigned once more in the land; nowhere would he have been safer than under Matteo's protection. The Countess could

not exist without Don Matteo's spiritual aid; her brother was the Holy Father's chamberlain, and the handsome Monsignor Udobaldi, the Holy Father's favourite, was the Countess's beloved friend. It was impossible for him to refuse the fair Countess's father confessor any favour that he might ask of him.

It was said in the Piazza Rusticucci, the Borgo, and the Lungara, that whatever Marco had done in the Romagna, and however much he might have been hunted there, in Rome no one would search for him, no, nor see him if he placed himself under their very eyes. The Countess's attachment to Matteo and her well known influence on Monsignor Udobaldi accounted for this, and to them Marco owed his escape.

The life he led in the Palazzo Roccaforte was very much to his taste. He helped to exercise the horses, occasionally did some secretary's work of no importance, and on gala days he appeared in livery.

He still lived in his uncle's house: and when the good man exhorted him to make up his mind to go into some profession or trade, Marco said he should enlist in the foreign legion and go to Algiers, or set out for South America and find something to do there. This frightened the priest, and he would hastily assure

him that at any rate the approval of her Highness the Princess must be waited for. To this Marco always agreed and continued to hang about the neighbourhood, making friends in the nearest taverns with the Pope's Swiss Guard, and quite expecting that one fine day he would fall in with a piece of luck and make his fortune.

One day he had met Padre Eusebio, whom he had known when he was in the cloister. The Padre was on his way to Gianbattista's. He walked with him as far as the door, and the Padre invited him to go in with him. Gianbattista and Stella had been sitting all the afternoon hard at work preparing church ornaments for an approaching feast-day. Eusebio and Marco joined them, and the visitors were entertained with the usual bottle of wine. The talkative Marco showed his gratitude by telling them all the news and gossip he knew, and while he did so he helped Gianbattista with the decorations, and, as the work was something new he did it well and displayed great taste and skill.

Gianbattista was pleased, and Marco fell in love with Stella's beauty! He came again and then again, and very soon was a constant visitor. After this, the priest met Gianbattista in the church when mass was

over and asked him whether he felt disposed to instruct Marco and teach him as much of his business as could be acquired in his spare hours. To anyone in the service of the nobility it would be most useful to understand such things; especially in the country, where ornaments and decorations could not be obtained at a moment's notice. The Princess had expressed her approval of the scheme; and so it came to pass that Marco went out with Gianbattista one morning to work in one of the Frascati churches, much to the astonishment of the neighbours.

The good people got over their surprise when it happened not once but several times; supposing that Gianbattista had selected the fine young man for his successor and his daughter's husband for of course with such interest as that of the Princess Roccaforte, Padre Eusebio and the reverend priest he must have good testimonials.

Marco was highly delighted with the arrangement. He drank toasts and played cards with the Swiss Guards just the same as before; there was no lack of provisions and good wine for their refreshment when they worked in the churches and convents. He had as much society as he wanted in the servants'

hall and stables of Roccaforte. Leading this kind of life it was impossible for the priest to watch him very closely.

Gianbattista enjoyed his lively company a great deal more than he ever had quiet Lippo's, and Marco for his part liked him well enough; but Stella was the great attraction. However early he went in the morning to fetch the old man, Stella was always there, pouring out the coffee and looking as fresh and lovely as a rose. Now, as she knew the two men had to start early the morning that followed the dance at the Vigne, she would not go to bed till she had got all straight and tidy and prepared the breakfast for to-morrow. She laid the fire, put the coffee in the bright tin coffee-pot, arranged the cups and saucers on the table, so that if she should chance to sleep a little later the next morning, all would be ready. Yet she could not keep her mind in her work, everything she did was upside down. Not that she was tired or sleepy; she felt as bright and fresh as she had in the morning. But she could not get the thought of Venus out of her head, or what the Milordo had said to her; although she could not have repeated his words or told anyone what he had meant by them.

Filippo sat silently watching her. She wished he would not do so, it made her uncomfortable.

“Are not you going to bed?” she asked.

“Directly,” was his answer. “Why don’t you speak?”

“I have been speaking,” she said.

“Only a few words then! Didn’t you enjoy it after all.”

“Of course, very, very much. I thought I had told you so. Oh, it was lovely! and I thank you a thousand times for giving me this pleasure.” After this there was silence again. They had generally more to say to each other. They had never parted yet for the night without saying “good-night,” but now Stella forgot it. She left Filippo without a word and went to her room.

The window stood wide open as she entered it. On this side of the house the yard was not overlooked, the moon shone into the room and made it as light as by day. So she lowered the wick of her curious old lamp and extinguished it.

As she drew the silver comb out of her hair, and took off the muslin kerchief edged with lace and the gold cross, she thought how prettily she might dress

herself to be painted by some one else and not always by Lippo. For him she was obliged to put on such heavy draperies and queer old cloaks such as no human being ever wore. Then there came into her mind a picture she had once seen in Filippo's studio. It was one of Nilo's sketches which he had presented to his friend. It was the figure of a woman, with only a red scarf thrown lightly round her hips, reposing in the moonlight under some trees in a lonely meadow. She had looked at it then and thought no more about it. But that must have been a Venus, for the woman was beautiful, very beautiful! And *she* was beautiful too! She recalled exactly how that Venus lay: half sitting up, her arm raised to support her head, one knee bent, and crossed over the other, and her white foot stretched out so that the moon shone on it.

Such was the position in the picture: and in her exultant gladness over her own beauty she threw herself—she was nearly undressed—on to the hard tile-floor in the same attitude. She laughed quietly for glee at succeeding so well. But as she raised her head on a level with the window, the pale face of the moon looked straight at her. She started and felt sud-

denly ashamed of her half clothed condition. Full of fear that she might be compelled, like those possessed with evil spirits, to follow the moon wherever she went and climb over the leads and roofs, she jumped into bed, crossed herself and, drawing the coverlet over her face, said an extra paternoster, but it was of no avail. When the moon was gone she saw before her closed eyes Nilo's great figure; and even while she prayed she heard the hum of the mandolines, and saw the dancers whirling round. The other too, the Milordo, stood before her. She felt his soft, delicate hand in hers again, such a soft hand as she had never touched before, and heard his low-toned, melodious voice; only what he had said to her, she could not remember, but she was sure it was something very nice, and in thinking of it she fell into a sweet slumber.

The next morning she had given Gianbattista and Marco their breakfast a good two hours before Filippo left his room.

The traces of a sleepless night were only too plainly to be seen in his heavy eyes and pale face. He said his usual good morning but he was oppressively solemn, and the way in which he followed

with his eyes Stella's every movement, did not escape her.

"Is there anything you want?" she asked. He answered her curtly that there was not, and then she began to fancy she must have displeased him and to wonder how she had offended him. She never could bear her father or Filippo to be vexed with her. She either had forgotten or did not wish to remember her own silence the night before. To-day she was determined to talk.

"Tell me," she began, as she handed him his coffee, "tell me, Lippo, is it far to England?"

"Yes, a long way. Through many countries and over the sea."

"Ah! I am glad of that," said Stella.

"Why? How can it concern you?"

"It *does* concern me," she said smiling, "for the Milordo won't go back to his country if it is such a long way off, and I am glad because he is so handsome. I dreamed of him the whole night long."

Filippo looked horrified. She did not notice it and continued her chattering. "The Nilo had caught me in his arms and was carrying me away; and I cried out to father and you, to make him leave me alone,

but you didn't hear, and then I had no voice left to shout with. All of a sudden Milordo appeared and drew his sword like uncle's holy St. George at the Capuccini, and thrust it into the dragon"—she interrupted herself, laughing gaily—"no! not into the dragon, but into great stout Nilo—"

"And what next?" asked Filippo anxiously. Stella looked at him as if wondering what more he wanted to hear. "What happened after Milordo stabbed Nilo?" he demanded again, with ever increasing uneasiness.

"Nothing! What should happen?" asked Stella. "I woke up then. But I still saw him, the tall, slight Milordo with his blue eyes and fair hair. And such soft white hands! None of you have hands like that. So soft! like his voice."

"What did he talk to you about then, yesterday?"

"He only looked at me and I at him. He didn't talk to me, except when he said you should go on painting me as the saints. But," she stopped short, then added pleadingly, "oh but do paint me as Venus, that would be far more beautiful."

"Stella, what do you mean?" he exclaimed angrily. "Who put that idea into your head?"

"Oh," she replied, "Nilo said he would like to have me as a model for Venus—of course, he meant with clothes on! Why do you bring me pretty things, when you never paint me in them! Milordo painted Nina once in her prettiest dress, and sent it home to his mother to hang up in her castle, and Nilo and the others—" she stopped.

"Well, and what about the others?"

She evaded his question. "Only I am as pretty as Nina," she said, turning her head away, so that he should not see how she blushed at her own words. Filippo rose. He said no more, but jammed his broad-brimmed hat down on his long black hair, and prepared to go out. Not till now did Stella notice that he hadn't touched the bread she had put on his plate. She asked him if he were not well.

"I have a headache," he said shortly. And she believed him. For he was not strong, and when he worked too hard, often complained of headache. But never had he looked so gloomy as to-day.

"Lippo!" she exclaimed, "what have I done that you won't even look at me? Just tell me plainly what it is, so that I may know how I have offended you!"

"Nothing, nothing! I am not offended," he assured her. But she was not satisfied.

"If taking me out for once has made you so cross, you had better have left me at home," she pouted.

"You are right, it would have been better," he answered bitterly, and went towards the door. But when he reached it he turned back and asked: "When will the Padrone be back?"

Stella said that, as it was so far to Santa Maria, he would take his midday meal there.

"Then I will come back to dinner," Filippo said. As a rule he ate his *pranzo* in the town with his friends.

"Just as you like. You shall find everything ready," she replied, and then, looking after him, she said to herself: "Poor Lippo, how pale and yellow he is to-day. I must make him something he likes, to put him in good spirits again. Poor old Lippo!"

She finished her house work with her usual speed, and then went with a basket to the green-grocer's and the *pizzicaruolo's* to get what was necessary for dinner, and at the butcher's she met Chiaruccia who was coming from her work.

“I have to go to Nilo very early,” she said, “because later he has a lot of visitors, foreigners you know. I have been sitting three hours to-day, and I am ready to drop with fatigue.”

She chose a piece of fat pork, and while she watched it being weighed she said: “Do you know, you might do me a favour. Come with me to-morrow when I go to Nilo’s! He wants us there together, you and me.—He has another order from a German Prince for a big landscape. He is painting a queen,—no, a goddess!”—it was all the same which as long as it sounded attractive to Stella—“a goddess, splendidly dressed, resting in the shade near a church with all her ladies-in-waiting. It will be lovely. He has promised me a double fee if I can get Gianbattista to let you come, and he will pay you well, I know, if you’ll stand as his model!”

“For money! oh no!” exclaimed Stella hotly. “I won’t be a *paid* model. They say that is a hateful trade.”

“Hateful trade, indeed! Who said so?” asked Chiaruccia wrathfully. “It is very well for rich people to say that; women and girls, who have a comfortable time of it like you. There is no need for

you to earn anything with a father, and some one else who gives you all you want. I mean Lippo. Do you know what people might say about you and your Santo if they chose? Hateful trade!" she burst out again, "mine is not a hateful trade! I am as good as you are. I have to feed a blind father and a mother who is always ill, and that is an honourable trade! The priest said so when I confessed to him how much I should like a husband, and how those who liked me wouldn't have me because of the burden my old parents would be to them. It is a sore affliction, and the bread I eat is hardly and honestly earned, I can assure you!"

"I know, I know!" said Stella, who repented having hurt her feelings. "It is hard work and dull work, too, to sit or stand without moving like the saints on the bridge."

"It is hard work," repeated Chiaruccia. "One gets so stiff, that in the evening one can hardly feel one's legs; but it isn't dull! It may be no fun for you because grave Filippo always paints you, and he is just as stolid as if he were made of stone. But Nilo is lively company enough; he makes you laugh till you cry. And Milordo is better still. He is as polite

to you as if you were a princess; and has always got sweet Genzano wine and paniotti from Milan, and kind words to refresh you with, when he thinks you can't do any more. I like working with him. He is a real gentleman! And so is Nilo, too, only he talks and laughs louder than Milordo."

Stella listened full of curiosity and interest. When they had made their purchases and reached the door of her home, she proposed that Chiaruccia should come in and tell her some more. She did not need much persuasion when Stella offered her breakfast.

Wine, bread and *ricotta* were quickly set before her, and eating and drinking to her heart's content, Chiaruccia's chatter was unceasing. She told about the foreigners who visited the painters' studios. She described their dress, mimicked the voices and ways of young and old, beautiful and ugly, and said how ridiculous and laughable it was when the foreign gentlemen tried to tell her in her own language that she was pretty. Stella was highly amused at her friend's stories; but some of her speeches and gestures puzzled her, and she could not help thinking of them long after Chiaruccia had left her.

"You had better not say I have been here,"

was her advice at parting, "if you don't come with me."

Stella watched her out of sight and then went back into the house. She sat in the kitchen, and dressed the broccoli for Lippo's dinner. One of the neighbour's flight of pigeons flew down into the yard, and pecked about there, and just above, the little windmill which he had put up near the chimney for his children's amusement, turned round in the breeze. The very same pigeons came every day, and their visits were only varied by the sparrows'. The little windmill went round yesterday just as it did to-day. It was always the same monotonous round, day after day, never any change. Chiaruccia had a much better time of it. She had plenty of variety in going now to Nilo, and then to Milordo, and seeing all kinds of people and things.

But she? How could she stir from the house without her father knowing it and forbidding it? And even if she should disobey him for once and go with Chiaruccia to Nilo's studio, Lippo would be sure to find it out immediately. Chiaruccia was right when she said he kept her all to himself!

She would not say anything about it to him, for he had gone out in a bad temper, and she felt cross

herself, almost as cross as her father must have felt the day before when he scolded her so angrily. She was weary and sick of the life in the yard. She would like to go out like the others. To go to Milordo and be painted! She could stand for hours without being tired she thought, if she might only look at him all the time. And to be looked at by him! She laughed and told herself she would never weary of that!

CHAPTER V.

FILIPPO had intended to go the first thing that morning to his friends, whose studios were in the same house as his own, but on a different storey. He wanted to tell them as soon as possible all that he had hitherto kept from them. It would be a relief to get it over.

Notwithstanding when he had climbed the staircase and stood at Wilfrid's door, he did not ring the bell that he had taken in his hand. After all, what had he to say? Nina had already told them that Stella was not his sister; what else she might have said about him he could not know. Of what interest would it be to them to learn that he was ignorant of how he came into the world. For his friends he was simply the fellow worker and brother artist and nothing nearer, and they had no right to demand an account of his relations to Gianbattista's daughter whom he had seen grow up from babyhood. He had always admired Wilfrid's reserve about himself and his belongings.

Why should he not follow the example of the man he liked and respected?

So he passed by his friends' doors, and mounted to his own studio, where he put on his painting coat, squeezed the colours on his palette, and went to his easel. Stella's eyes gazed at him serenely from the canvas, those soft brown eyes with the expression of heavenly peace in them. How differently they had looked at him this morning! He cursed his stupidity in taking her out to the fête!

He again felt the same passionate jealousy that had taken possession of him yesterday, when he saw her the centre of admiration, and conscious and not displeased at the attention her beauty attracted. He had not slept all night for thinking of her, and since she had related her dream and expressed her liking for Wilfrid, his torture had become even greater. For he loved Stella; and now he had discovered the nature and extent of that love, it could never be the same between them again.

He had never thought much of his appearance, never compared himself with Wilfrid and Adalbert. As an artist he knew himself to be on the same level with, if not superior to, them. He had been happy in

the possession of Stella as his model, and in the esteem of his friends, and content with his gradual but sure progress in his beloved art. But now, when he saw the effect Wilfrid's gentlemanlike bearing had had on Stella, it pained him that he was not a cultured man of the world like Wilfrid, or even a muscular giant like Nilo.

In addition to his jealousy of Stella he was now tormented with envy. He felt as much ashamed of the one sentiment as the other, but he could not suppress either. And he felt that he could not meet his friends in his present state of mind. He started whenever he heard a sound on the stairs or in the corridor outside his studio. He was afraid one of them, or both, might be coming, (although they did not often visit him during working hours); and in spite of having made up his mind a few minutes before that he was perfectly justified in keeping his history from his friends, he now reproached himself, and believed that he ought to bear the blot on his name openly, and trust that God's guidance would carry him forward if he faithfully continued his honourable and creative work in behalf of the Church.

He could not master his disturbed and stormy

thoughts, and he found it impossible to paint. What if Wilfrid should come in now, see the picture and Stella's eyes and glory in her beauty! Wilfrid, who was his friend and rich enough to buy the picture and keep it always in his neighbourhood! He would rather, he thought, cut it in a thousand pieces than allow Wilfrid to possess it.

He threw down palette and brush, left everything standing as it was and went quickly down, out into the street and over the Piazza del Popolo in the direction of the Villa Borghese.

What his object was in going there, he did not ask himself, or know. He wanted to get away out of his friends' reach and away from his own thoughts. He hastened on quicker and quicker, as if his agony were following him and not part of himself, and as if he could escape from it. He did not see the people he met, nor the carriages that drove past him; he was not anxious for air or light. He threw himself down where the trees cast their gloomiest shadows and where the thicket all round was most dense and untrodden. He wished to stay where no eye could see him; for his distorted vision saw a picture of himself, which was very far from resembling the at-

tractive and noble original, and he felt weighed down to the dust with humiliation and the pangs of self inflicted torture.

What chance had he with his sallow sour face, among his brilliant and handsome comrades? How could he expect to win love who had been cast out in the world loveless, and forsaken by his own mother? How could Stella possibly take to him, when her whole nature was so sensitive to beauty? when he himself had taught her to value only what was beautiful? She could not hesitate between him and his well favoured friend.—And yet his heart was filled with love for her.

How devoted he had been to the child from the day when Cleofa had first shown her to him. How often he had carried the little one in his arms and rocked her to sleep on his knees, even when the other boys jeered at him. With what joy he had watched her grow up, what a sacred and ideal place she had held in his heart. So sacred, so pure a being had she seemed to him, that no passionate desire had ever stirred within him, and he had forgotten that she was only a beautiful woman. He had loved and worshipped her, as the Christians worshipped the pictures he painted of her. And now it was all over. The de-

light she had shown in his two friends' impassioned admiration had broken the holy spell.

He could not check the tears that came into his eyes. He was thankful to be alone and seen by nobody. Then he began to collect himself, and thought what a refuge the creative genius had been with which the Lord in his goodness had blessed him, and which had been the consolation and joy of his existence, how much Padre Eusebio and Gianbattista had done for him, how Cleofa had taken him to her heart, and left him Stella as a legacy, and what an invaluable possession she had been! Had not his model been the envy of the artist world? He remembered how he had always considered himself lucky in winning the friendship of men superior to him in birth and education, who generously ranked themselves beneath him in art; till with the variableness of the true artistic nature, he began to think he had as much to be thankful for as to lament over. He accused himself of being ungrateful, discontented with his lot, and most unjust to Stella.

Her father and he had never done anything to amuse her till now, and because she was pleased at mixing with her fellow creatures, and had told him a

harmless childish dream, he had left the house without speaking a civil word to her. She had always been good to him, had cheered him many a time when he was down-hearted, and nursed him when he was ill, and called him her Filippo, her dear Lippo, as if he had been her brother or even her husband!

He sprang to his feet, the thought struck him like a flash of lightening! Her mother had commended her to his care, her father had said that his daughter should never have a husband that took her away from him; and he loved Stella. His whole soul was full of her, all his life he had only known this one love, but now it was warmer and more restless than it had been before. He felt a passionate longing for her, and a vehement desire to settle the relations between them happily.

As he tore along in the direction of home in the fierce midday sun, full of new hope, he wondered how he should find her and how he should say what he wanted to say. He knew that she had to sew some old church-lace on a piece of silk stuff which Gianbattista was going to utilize for an altar decoration the next day. This kind of work she never did outside the door; and, as his imagination shaped every thing

into a picture, he saw himself entering the house and standing over her as she sat sedately at her work, and looked up at him with her great eyes.

However, before he reached the house, Stella came up to him in the street. He asked where she had been, and she told him Chiaruccia had visited her and eaten all the bread there was in the house. She had been to fetch more, but the dinner was quite ready and she would dish it up directly.

Although this was not what he expected, it was all very nice and comfortable. She looked charming as she moved up and down or sat opposite him at the head of the table. Unmasked, she related all Chiaruccia's prattle. He was obliged to laugh at it, although he did not approve of it. It was evident that it was high time Stella had a husband to look after and protect her. She had been left to herself too long. He must speak to her to-day. But it was impossible to make his offer in the midst of her light chatter, and he would not interrupt her, for fear of putting her out of her good temper. So he listened indifferently, waiting his opportunity, and trying to think of the right words to use. Then she became silent too, and rose from the table when she had finished her meal.

“Are you going already?” he asked, suddenly waking up.

“Why should I sit there, when you don’t speak a word,” she answered. “You don’t say why you have come home so much earlier, and you look at me as if you wanted something. Say straight out what it is, and I will see if I can get it for you.”

There was something irresistible in her eagerness to oblige him, and it gave him courage. “I have something on my mind that concerns you Stella,” he said, “come here and sit by me.”

She obeyed and he took her hand. “Would you like to be married, Stella?” he asked.

Her face lighted, and then, from the roots of her hair to her beautiful neck, she was suffused with a glowing pink. She turned to him with a pleased expectant smile.

“Who wishes to marry me?” she asked.

“I do! I want you!” he exclaimed, putting his arm round her.

She sprang up and pushing him from her she pouted: “What nonsense! I am not a child now. Besides, one oughtn’t to joke about marrying!”

She was going to leave the room, but he held her fast.

"Listen to me. I am not jesting. I love you, Stella!"

"And I love you too!" she answered disturbed and vexed, "but brother and sister can't marry!"

With an effort he controlled the jealous feeling which her first remark had awakened within him, and said as calmly as he could, "We are not brother and sister, my Stella! When I was a boy and you a child, I loved you as my little sister. Now, as you have just said yourself, you are no longer a child. The Padrone thinks it will soon be time to choose a husband for you. Choose one for yourself. Take me! I love you, Stella. You are the light of my eyes, no one loves you as much as I do! I—"

"Oh!" she cried, and the tears rained down her cheeks. "I know it, and I love you too. Listen! if you were taken very ill to-morrow, (and you are ailing at times,) I would nurse you and never move from your side day nor night! And if father died and I were left poor and miserable, I should come to you and say to you: Help me! But marry?" she shook her head and, laying her hands on his shoulders, kissed him. "There,"

she said as she did it, "I love you, very much. But really, my Lippo, I can never marry you. No, never! So don't say any more about it, my Lippo. Come! let us forget it, and be as happy as we were before. Come, cheer up!"

But she herself could not be cheerful; for she cried bitterly and went out and left him. Filippo knew only too well the cause of her tears.

CHAPTER VI.

“It can’t be helped!” he said standing up, after he had sat a long time lost in thought. “I must go on the same as usual!”

But it is not so easy to go on the same as usual when you have received a stab in the heart, and suddenly found the world around so completely changed that you can’t see your way in it.

He had thought that morning as he walked home, how he would take the little house and garden on the brow of the hill near his studio. He had pictured himself and Stella sitting under the trees in the moonlit evenings, and Gianbattista enjoying his old age there. What a joy it must be to the artist to perpetuate his wife and children as objects of devotion for the pious souls of all times; to see his own dearest ones adored by others, to win earthly immortality through the means of those you love deeply and tenderly. All these hopes were now dashed for ever.

Nothing could be the same as it had been before. All must be completely changed; and when he considered the matter he came to the conclusion he had better leave Rome.

Leave Rome?—Then Stella would be left to her own devices, and under the bad influence of Nina and Chiaruccia; then she would become Adalbert's and Wilfrid's model—and she loved Wilfrid! No! he could not go away and he could not stay. Aimlessly as he had left his studio that morning, he went out into the streets again. Then he turned round and went back for his sketch book, seizing it as a reeling man clings to some support. He did not know what he was going to do with it, till it occurred to him he had wanted to sketch a beautiful group of palms in the Villa Massimo, for a picture of the flight of the holy Family. So he bent his steps in that direction.

When he came to the Cappuccini on the Piazza Barberini, where Stella's great uncle Eusebio lived, it occurred to him to ask his advice, but he recoiled from doing so, considering that to ask advice would involve telling what had happened that day. And it seemed to him that it would be easier to whisper

his heart's secret, his troubles and misery, to his own father confessor, kneeling unseen at the confessional, than to stand face to face with Padre Eusebio and discuss them aloud.

He descended the monastery steps which he had mounted, and went on till he reached the villa, which was still in all its summer glory. He sat down and felt calmer. He drew with a care and precision that were not at all necessary for his object; and in spite of the pain at his heart, and the bitter thoughts, which he could not banish, he succeeded, tired out as he was with his solitary wandering, in working steadily for some hours. Then the sky began to redden between the fan-shaped palm leaves, and the shadows to lengthen, and the loud screaming of the daws, as they flew through the soft air in large parties towards the richly wooded slopes, reminded him that the air was growing chill, and that it was time to avoid the damp and heavy dew.

But he did not go straight home, for he dreaded meeting Stella after what had passed between them. He went into the town to make a few purchases, and in the narrow streets it was quite dusk, when at last

he turned out of the Borgo Vecchio into the Piazza Rusticucci, where it was still broad day-light.

As he approached he saw people, running towards Gianbattista's door. Others stood in groups about the square, looking mysterious and anxious. A carriage full of strangers, had stopped to inquire what was the matter. Some Capuchins, (who never are missing in a crowd,) were speaking with animated gestures, to all appearance giving the strangers information. *Carabinieri* kept back those who eagerly pressed forward to the house.

"What is going on there?" asked Filippo striding forwards in breathless haste.

"I don't know exactly," answered someone who was coming away from the crowd. "I think there has been an accident. Somebody has been killed on the spot."

"Who, who is it?" cried Filippo in a frenzy.

"No one knows! The police won't allow any more to go into the house." At the same moment a neighbour who knew him rushed up.

"At last! at last!" he exclaimed, "make haste in, Marco went two hours ago to look for you and Padre Eusebio. The Padre is there now, but Stella is

almost out of her mind, and Marco has gone again to find you."

Filippo did not wait to hear more. How he made his way through the throng and reached the house, he could not have told you himself.

A police officer was on guard at the door and at the repeated exclamation from all sides, "There he is!" "there he is at last!" he made way for him.

The door of the sitting room was open, and there lay Gianbattista's corpse on a stretcher. He had met with an accident at his work.

Stella had flung herself on the dead man, and not all the entreaties of her grandparents and Padre Eusebio, whom they had fetched from his monastery at the other end of the town, could induce her to move from him. It was a heart-rending sight.

Filippo's exclamation of distress made her look up, and, with a piercing cry, she threw herself into his arms.

CHAPTER VII.

On the following day, at the usual hour, Wilfrid went across to Adalbert's studio to remind him that it was time for relaxation and refreshment.

"Ah, you have just come at the right moment!" exclaimed Adalbert, stepping backwards from his easel with his head on one side, and closing one eye to steady his view. "What do you think, Milordo, do the figures recede into the background enough, now?"

Wilfrid came and stood by his side. It was a huge canvas, which had to be looked at from a little distance. A German Count, an artistic friend of Adalbert's, had given him an order for one of those idealized landscapes on a large scale for which he was so famous. He had requested that the wood of Egeria, not far from Rome, should be the subject, and that mythological figures, or figures from ancient history, should be introduced into the picture. Accord-

ingly Adalbert had made a little temple in the valley instead of the picturesque ruins that still stand there, and had conceived the nymph Egeria, not as the counsellor and betrayer of Numa, but as the life-giving goddess who was worshipped there, and to whom the young Roman women frequently offered sacrifices. He had depicted a young Roman lady of rank, who, coming from the ceremony, stops to rest with her companions beneath the trees, while in the background the servants with the litter and other trappings await their mistresses' signal for departure.

“Yes,” said Wilfrid, “it is much better so. The shadowy outline of the temple and the servants' figures, makes the fair forms of the ladies stand out in marked relief. The whole tone of the picture is intensified by it and the perspective widened. Now Princess Val Marino's hair shines like gold in the sunbeams which play upon it through the trees. Chiaruccia said something to the point when she called her a Venus in clothes. You may congratulate yourself on having got the Val Marino to sit to you. It is a beautiful, idealized likeness of her, and I shouldn't be surprised if she appeared next winter, at some large reception in the antique costume you have painted her in. The diadem

and the golden girdle would be a striking variety in feminine attire."

He remained contemplating the work in silence, till Adalbert, who had again taken up his brush to put in a shadow or two, asked him what he was thinking about.

"I was only thinking, what I have often said to you before, that the longer I live among you artists, the more I am convinced that only the great and ideal in painting lives and remains a joy for ever. The most excellent and finished execution can not do the same for the mere representation of the actual, or raise the realistic *vedute* and the still rougher realism of genre painting to an elevated place in the history of art. Year after year we may have an engraving of Raphael's 'Burning of the Borgo' before our eyes, and it never strikes us that the action of the youth, as he escapes from the burning house and clings to the wall, is always the same. The background of the scene, the burning of a whole quarter of the town, is a tragic and deeply interesting event, which makes a lasting impression on our imagination. Think what the same clinging attitude on the wall would seem to us, if the motive were a rendezvous, or a burglary.

The whole thing at once becomes miserably trivial, and to be reminded of it every day would be intolerable. It would weary me to see genre studies on my walls day after day, however exquisitely they might be painted."

"And yet you are a genre painter and paint English and Roman genre in a masterly way," remarked Adalbert.

"Whatever I paint, my opinion is the same. We and all that we do are but the fruits of our bringing up and of our earliest impressions. England has never produced a single great painter of scriptural events, and to my mind scarcely one, capable of portraying historical scenes."

"But it is a Protestant country," said Adalbert.

"It was Catholic at the time when Italy produced her greatest masters. The difference lies in the national character, although I am willing to admit, of how much Protestantism deprived the people, by its mistaken zeal in banishing art from the churches, and thereby shutting the masses out from a habitual contemplation of the beautiful. Church ritual in your country often awakens aspirations for the highest art in the mind of the young. For the first twelve years

of my life I was familiar with nothing but rural and domestic scenes, and till I spent a few weeks in London when I was fifteen, I had never seen a work of art, except mediocre family portraits of the kind that were painted in England at the end of the last century and in the beginning of this, and engravings which I did not care for, because of the absence of colour. When at last I beheld the imposing and grand in art, it was too late to abandon the small finicking style which I had adopted; besides, I had to return to Oxford, where at that time, unfortunately, there was no artistic spirit."

He spoke with a dejection which was unusual in him, and his friend, anxious to raise his spirits, said encouragingly, "I assure you it is possible to be great in a small way. Rubens is no less himself, in his scenes from peasant life, than in his sacred pictures and his portraits!"

Wilfrid took no notice of this remark, but letting his thoughts roam at will, he continued, "From whatever side you look at the question, I contend that nothing is to be gained by a simple adherence to nature. The mere reproduction of an object that pleases our fancy, is not the true vocation of art. If in one respect

art can not equal nature, in another it must idealize and intensify her. If it is to enthrall us and to be a lasting pleasure, it must represent the actual only in exceptional cases and grand and stirring moments."

"Your present depression of spirits, of which I do not pretend to know the cause, has perverted your judgment. You are doing despite to yourself and the whole range of genre painting,"—said Adalbert impatiently.

"I am not depressed: I have only come to the conclusion, to which I have been brought by long and deep thinking."

"Then you think, the mother at her hearth surrounded by her children, the clowns who are content to exist to bask in the sunshine, and the youth with his sweetheart on his knee; all these are not worth reproducing. If you follow that line of argument, Milordo, you will disown the power with which the jocund revels of the Peasant's Wedding were painted by Rubens. After hundreds of years every face laughs at us from the canvas in the Louvre, and makes us long, in spite of all our culture to feel the same fleshly ecstasy as these rogues in their unrestrained mirthfulness."

"I could hardly enjoy such a picture long, were it

not in its details different from the reality," said Wilfrid, "the artistic reduction of scale altering the things represented. There certainly are hundreds of people who do not know what to make of Teniers' pictures. But put them before the works of such an imagination as Perugino's, Francia's, Pinturicchio's (rooted as these are in stern beliefs), let them gaze at a Venus of Titian, in all the glory of her proud beauty, and the least instructed and impressionable of them will testify by their reverent silence that they are under the spell of an ideal. I have felt this consciousness of an inexplicable fascination, and it is not always the highest art that exercises it. When I stand before Guido Reni's St. Andrew here, when I contemplate his dead Christ and Viti's holy Magdalene at Bologna, I am seized with a longing for that pious exalted ardour, which these masters knew so well how to express. There have been moments when I have been moved to the same enthusiasm, but one would always like to retain it, and to paint under its inspiration, and one envies those to whom it has been granted to do this."

Adalbert was busy painting again, after a long pause he said, "Without agreeing with you altogether,

I am ready to admit, that the perfect and harmonious beauty we meet in ancient sculpture and the paintings of the great masters, has a more elevating influence upon us than so called character studies. Indeed I prefer myself as you know to paint wild, lonely and emotional scenes, rather than tame and cultivated ground. But we," he said with a laugh, "or perhaps I should say, I am earthy enough to feel a nearer affinity to Teniers, and Rubens' jolly fellows, than to Raphael's and Perugino's ideals; and a beautiful woman is not made to be only worshipped either, the divine Stella, for instance, whom our San Filippo cunningly canonized as his sister, so as to deprive us and our art of her for evermore!"

Wilfrid did not reply to this; presently he said, still thoughtfully, "Look at Filippo, what an artistic nobleness is the result of his early every day associations with artistic ideals, added to the constant contemplation of such a pure and perfect type of beauty. Belonging to the lower classes of the people, almost entirely without education, he has, through his simple unquestioning faith and the purity of his mind, reached a position in art and an idealism, which raises him, in my estimation, far above us!"

“Idealism is easier for him than for us,” said Adalbert, who was tired of the serious conversation. “As to his faith, he has never doubted, because he has never heard of such a thing as doubt. He has probably never been led into temptation as we have, and such a large amount of idealism is not so necessary for him with his puny form, as for me with my six foot two inches. Besides, don’t be too sure! Our Santo is not so passionless as you think. His eyes can flash! It was only yesterday though that I discovered the object of his passion. He was as jealous as a Turk!”

“You were too extravagant in your expressions of admiration perhaps,” suggested Wilfrid.

“I?—Now, Milordo, to-day you are not straight-forward, you whose sincerity I have always so heartily respected! If this is the influence of classical beauty, I can’t say much for it. The lovely child had eyes for none but you; and if you let this incomparable model slip through your fingers, it won’t be her fault.”

The colour mounted to Wilfrid’s smooth brow, but he answered his friend calmly.

“Stella’s beauty is too regular for a genre study, and almost too serious. — Perhaps it is seeing her,

which has brought my long cherished suspicions as to the worth of the so-called genre to a point, and increased my disgust with all my work hitherto. If I knew of a motive worthy of her, I would try to paint her! But how could I introduce her into anything commonplace and every-day."

"Think it over!" exclaimed Adalbert. "If the bewitchment, which made you yesterday as dazzling as Apollo among the shepherds, will permit of your doing anything rational. Meanwhile I have given our acute little Chiaruccia a hint, that she may earn a good round sum, if she can manage to ensnare the beautiful bird of paradise here for a few sittings. In contrast with my lady's head waiting-woman, whom I have painted after Chiaruccia's style, who always looks red and brown, and warm like a ripe grape in the sun, Stella's cool moonlight sort of beauty would make an admirable effect. Fancy her in that glossy green drapery, against the background of her companion's dull red costume. I shall not mind painting out the figure as it now stands, if I can get her. But I am afraid it will take time and patience and some stratagem to prevail upon the old man, who has no small opinion of himself, and the Santo too, to give her leave

to come. Stella herself would be only too happy, as she said yesterday. And as to you, you have only to express the wish, I believe, and you would get her here. Filippo would sooner grant you the favour than me; and if you got her, of course I should have her sooner or later."

Wilfrid was silent. The turn the conversation had taken attracted and at the same time annoyed him. There was something in Adalbert's whole manner to-day, which jarred upon him. He had thought of Stella and nothing else since yesterday. He was thinking of her at that moment, but to go shares in her as a model with another had not entered his head. Adalbert had exactly expressed his friend's mood. He was under a magician's wand. Wilfrid felt as if he had suddenly been transplanted into a different climate, and breathed a purer and better air, in which his whole being expanded.

Adalbert had by this time really put up his work. As he cleaned his brushes and palette, they again contemplated the effect the alterations had on the whole picture, and remarked on the improvement. They then went to fetch Filippo to lunch, but learnt from the landlord that he had been in his studio only

a few minutes that morning, and that he had gone without leaving any message for them.

In the afternoon he did not return to his work, which was not an unusual occurrence, as he painted from the life at home. To-day Wilfrid envied him the happiness of being alone with Stella, absorbed in the study of her beauty. . . . Stella, the child, and yet so perfected woman, like Raphael's Eve, or Shakespeare's Juliet on her first meeting with Romeo in her father's house.

The idea flashed across him. That was it! She must be painted as Juliet. So pure, so shy, and so full of joy in life and love. That was how he would paint her.

He saw the picture before him in all its details with a clearness that delighted him. He took up his sketchbook and worked with a zest he had never known before. It almost seemed as if the pencil had life in it.—He anticipated a new dawn of a new fair day for himself and his art; and Stella, Stella was the Aurora which guided him to the horizon.

CHAPTER VIII.

WILFRID set to work early the next morning. For the first time, he had ventured on an historical subject, and though he had yesterday depreciated himself and his talent to Adalbert, to-day he felt a security in his capabilities, as with a glow of enthusiasm he began to transfer his sketch to the canvas.

With decision he lightly sketched the outline of the banquetting hall on the huge space before him. He had many such places in his memory to select from. He put in with a swift and firm hand the groups among which the beautiful pair were to move, and placed the two youthful figures in the centre of the picture, so that the pillars which supported the vaulted roof of the hall formed the background, while it concealed them from a part of the company.

Every stroke delighted and interested him. As the sculptor sees with a prophetic eye his image

growing out of the rough block of marble, so Wilfrid saw in every line he drew Stella's complete beauty clearly before him; for she lived in his soul and illuminated his imagination. After he had sat several hours, his thoughts busily employed with her and his plan, his peace of mind began to desert him. He longed to see Stella, or at least her picture, and in Filippo's studio there hung a score of studies of which she was the original. He wanted to hear about her and to speak of her to some one, to tell his friend what a marvellous change had come over him, and what artistic project had occurred to him since yesterday. He felt that Filippo would understand how Stella's beauty had touched him, and sympathize more than Adalbert could do with the desire for some great and sublime achievement which it had stirred within him. He counted on his advice and help. He hurried up the stairs and rang at Filippo's door, but no one came; so he went down to the porter to inquire for Filippo. Pietro informed him that he had not been there at all that day. He was probably unwell or gone away into the mountains, where he had to execute an order for the Prince Roccaforte.

Wilfrid had heard that the Prince intended.

making Filippo an offer. He thought he would go and find out whether he had accepted it. He felt a strange excitement as he threw himself into a passing cabriolet and drove to Gianbattista's house.

As he drew nearer he saw a funeral advancing. With measured steps the bearers moved slowly forward. First came the "Fraternity," then the clergy of the parish their white surplices over their black habits with the great crucifix borne among them by a chorister. The monotonous melody of the litany for the dead fell upon Wilfrid's ear. Monks were in the procession muttering prayers and carrying lighted candles, and streetboys ran to catch the wax that dropped from them in paper bags which they had made for the purpose. As is customary, friends, neighbours and passers-by had joined the file of the mourners. Wilfrid had long since become used to such spectacles, and he would hardly have heeded the funeral train, had he not, to his horror, caught sight of Gianbattista's corpse in the open coffin, as he stood up to get out of the cabriolet. There lay all that remained of the old man, the warm golden sunlight playing for the last time on the withered, sunken face.

In a moment he had alighted and stood near Fi-

lippo, who walked between Stella's grandfather and Marco next the coffin.

"What has happened?" he asked.

"The ladder slipped from under him just as he was finishing his work in San Lucca's. He broke his neck and death was instantaneous," Filippo answered, his voice trembling. The exclamation "and she? and Stella?" rose to his lips, but with tact he suppressed it, and taking Marco's place, whom he did not seem to notice, close to Filippo's side, he asked 'as calmly as he could, "and Gianbattista's daughter?"

"She will follow directly. I ordered a carriage for her grandmother and her."

"My poor friend!" said Wilfrid deeply moved; and in silence he accompanied Filippo along the road to the last resting-place of Gianbattista.

This was the most natural thing to do in the world. It was scarcely possible to act otherwise. But although it was the custom, Filippo was grateful to Wilfrid for what he considered a mark of his friendship; the other followers of the corpse looked upon it as a great honour done to the dead, that the distinguished

foreigner should follow a humble artisan to the grave.

Wilfrid was lost in grave contemplation of himself, as he walked through the streets of Rome behind a crucifix, in a procession of good Catholics to take part in one of their most solemn ceremonials. The intricate and subtle connexion of unforeseen events, which makes itself felt in every human life, carried his thoughts back to his home and his childhood.

What would his mother say if she could see him? she who was such a bigoted Protestant and regarded the Roman Church and its doctrine with abhorrence! She had refused to have any further intercourse with her niece, the present Princess of Roccaforte, when five years before she had joined the Church of Rome, and saw with ever increasing suspicion Wilfrid's return to Italy, because she could not forget that he had flatly refused to break with his cousin as she had done, and she believed the continued friendship might prove dangerous.

Lady Jane did not know that his long sojourns in Italy, and his extended knowledge of the world, had made him tolerant of all religions, so far as they

supply the religious needs of those who profess them, and are the stay and consolation, absolutely necessary to any one who cannot simply surrender himself to the unforeseen and inevitable.

The pomp and splendour of the Catholic ritual were positively repulsive to his mother. He on the contrary rejoiced to see it, for it seemed to him so natural that men should collect all that is most beautiful and choicest in the places where they bend their knees with others, to praise the great unseen Power to whom they and the Universe owe their being.

He was moved now by the sound of the old chant in spite of its indifferent rendering, and touched by the prayers which are murmured over thousands, as they are consigned to their last resting-place in the quiet earth's bosom. He felt keenly for the innocent being, just grown out of childhood, sprung from the lower classes, and now left an orphan, and exposed to all the temptations which surround those in her position of life.

He was startled as he weighed this consideration in his mind, but he was used to dealing honestly with himself, and he did not deceive himself in this

case. He knew that he was moved by something besides a mere kindly benevolence and care for the sorrow of a fellow-creature.

Had there suddenly appeared to him in reality one of the saints, representing whom he had often admired Stella in Filippo's pictures, his reverence for her beauty, the holiness of his devotion, and the desire to represent her as she had appeared to him, could not have been greater. But with this admiration of the artist for the divinely beautiful, was mingled a love which only man can cherish for woman. Never for another had he felt so warm a passion; it was a love that cheered him like the bright spring morning which promises a long succession of equally lovely days; and her liking for him, which she had betrayed in her innocence, completed the enchantment.

When the procession reached the churchyard the usual ceremonies took place, and the body was laid in the grave. Wilfrid, standing behind the rest, watched with a full heart the lovely girl who, half concealed in the black veil that had been thrown over her, had abandoned herself to her grief, and never raised her eyes from the spot where her father lay. As the murmurs of the last prayers died away, and

the clergy and friends began to depart, Filippo went up to Stella and she, with one of her impulsive movements, flung her arms round his neck and cried: "We are alone now, Filippo!"

He clasped her to his breast, and they wept together. Her grandfather and Padre Eusebio then advanced to them with Marco. Eusebio tried the usual suggestions of comfort, "they much take heart, man is born to die; people often lost their friends and benefactors, and their parents they were bound to lose once. When God took parents he sent children in their place, and then the time came when *they* had to bury their parents also! It was God's ordering, and one ought not to grumble at it."

"Yes," sobbed Stella, "yes, I know it is God's will, but God's will is hard!"

Padre Eusebio reproved her gravely, she glanced up shrinking from her own words, and saw Wilfrid standing before her.

"Poor, poor Stella!" he said gently, holding out his hand to her. Stella seized it with eager haste.

"Signore, ah, dear Signore!" she cried softly, and before he could prevent her, she had bent down and kissed his hand.

“Stella! dearest Stella! what are you doing?” he exclaimed, but she turned from him and threw herself across her father’s grave, where she wept as if her heart would break.

It was all they could do to get her away. Wilfrid had given Filippo’s hand a friendly pressure and departed, before she had risen from the grave. Then Padre Eusebio, Filippo and her grandmother got into the carriage with her and drove home.

Marco accompanied her grandfather on foot. The old tinman was graver than usual. He was not younger than Gianbattista, at whose funeral they had been assisting.

“That ladder climbing is a bad business! When folks are old and stiff in the joints, they should leave off that sort of work!” he said, as if he wanted to comfort himself with the thought that his trade insured him against such accidents. “Ornamenting churches is dangerous work!”

“Not more than anything else!” said Marco in his loud, blustering tones, “all work is alike, and the worst piece of work is death; for every one must die, however lazy they are, and so get into paradise, where working and dying are at an end! Till then I say a

man should enjoy his life. Every funeral preaches that, and whenever I come from one, I go and make a good day of it, and do just what I like best. For who knows whether the days up there will be to our taste?"

He laughed; the old tinman was shocked. The wan face of his old friend and son-in-law was still before his mental vision. "Shame upon you!" he said crossing himself. "What would your reverend uncle say if he heard you!"

"I'll confess it to him!" jested Marco, "and you know Santa Maria Traspontina has large indulgences."

The tinman shook his head and with a testy farewell left Marco, who turned into an inn, where he was one of the most constant customers. There, in a back room, foreign priests of the lowest orders, chatted and drank. Hanging about the door Marco found, as usual, some Pope's Swiss guards, jovial fellows who were willing enough to sit down and drink with him; but for all that he was less talkative than sometimes, and the flavour of the wine was not as good as usual. He could not get Stella out of his head. What had that foreigner, to whom he had taken a dislike in the

Vigne, wanted at Gianbattista's grave? Why had Stella kissed his hand? He had a hand too for that matter, and where that hand struck, the blow was sure! Unconsciously he drove the knife he held in his hand through the table. His neighbour asked him what he did it for.

"Oh, only to amuse myself," laughed Marco, "for I have been to a funeral and want to get up my spirits," and rattling his tankard on the table, he said: "We must enjoy life, man, while we have the chance. Boy, bring another bottle!"

While Marco sat over his wine, Filippo and Stella had reached home long ago. Everything was the same, but the rooms seemed larger and terribly empty. The day wore on, like any other day. They both tried to do the same things as usual, and yet they could not forget the blank in the little home.

When the hour for dinner came they sat down together, as they had done the day Filippo had declared his love. For a long time neither of them could speak; at last Filippo said: "What will you do now?"

"It is for you to say! Father is dead, so you are the master," she answered.

"You can't stay here alone!"

“But you are here. I am not alone!” she exclaimed.

“I cannot live here with you, now the Padrone is dead. I must take a room somewhere near my studio, and you must go to your grandparents.”

She looked at him as if she did not understand him. “I go away from here! I who have never slept under any other roof. Leave my dear little room, and the picture of the Holy Mother, and the little altar beneath it? And you must go away too, you say. Oh, don’t speak of it, not to-day! I am unhappy enough as it is!”

Her sorrow went to his heart, he too felt a weight upon his soul, but he continued to talk to her calmly and firmly. He told her he was not her brother, and that if he stayed with her now, people would take him for her lover, and as she would not marry him, or go into a convent, there was nothing left for her but to go to her grandparents.

“You know what they are,” she said piteously. “Grandmother is never pleased with anything I do, she is always grumbling.”

“Well then, you must try all you can to please her, and your grandfather—”

“Grandfather,” she interrupted him, “is more patient, but he is stingy. He will hate having one more to feed, and he has no work that I could help him with, as I helped father.”

“Don’t distress yourself about that part of it,” comforted Filippo, “I will pay for your board, if you would rather have it so.”

She shook her head. “No!” she said. “When I was a child and people used to offer me money, because they liked me, you always said it was a shame to take money when one had done nothing to earn it; you said it was as good as begging. And I won’t be a beggar.”

“To take what a brother gives with all his heart,” broke in Filippo, “that is not begging.”

“But you said a few minutes ago, that you were not my brother, and that we couldn’t stay here together, because of it, so—”

He would not let her go on. “Did you not say the other day,” he reminded her, “that if ever you were in distress and misery you would come to me for help, and if I were sick and wretched you would not forsake me?”

The remembrance of the moment in which she had

said that made them both suddenly silent. Stella became crimson and dared not look at him. In his great generous heart love and compassion had conquered the pain and mortification she had inflicted on him then. He thought only of her, not of himself. He confessed that Stella's position in her grandparents' house would not be a pleasant one, and he was pleased at the honourable scruples she showed about living on their charity, and still more pleased that she had said she owed such keen perceptions of what was honourable to him. He must do all he could to make his proposal acceptable to her.

"Let us talk it over reasonably, Stella," he said. "You are right! Whoever is able to work should do something to earn his living: but if you and I must make a reckoning, I am in your debt. For years your father kept me and asked nothing in return, when I was working in the drawing-school and at the academy and could not earn anything; for years I had you and your mother for my models, and did not pay you. That must be put a stop to, you are right, you shall earn what you want. You know you are invaluable to me. No one understands my plans so well as you do, no one is as quick and clever at helping me

to carry them out. In future we will work together as we have done hitherto, but I will pay you for your work now, and we will be more industrious than ever. I will paint and you shall still be my model."

He had not finished speaking, before Stella's face brightened in the midst of her grief. "Yes!" she cried, "it will be all right so. That's how we'll manage it. I will stand model, it is a good trade! Chiaruccia, who is an honest girl, keeps herself and her parents by it. Then I shall be able to rent the room at the old people's house where the clerk lodges now, and have it all to myself and pay for my own food. I will make myself pretty dresses out of the stuff and laces and braids my poor father—God bless him—will not need any more now. And if I come to you to stand as your model, I can go to Nilo too, if he likes, and the good Milordo would paint me, I am sure. Tell him that I will come. Do you hear? and say I want to come too, very much."

Filippo heard, but he made no response. He wished now he could recal his proposal, but he thought it best to wait for a further explanation. He was content for the present to have cheered Stella, and to see her setting about her work with her accustomed energy.

He had not the heart to dispel her hopes as soon as he had raised them, he would ask Padre Eusebio's advice first.

That same afternoon he went out, and took the room he knew was to let near his studio. Then he proceeded to the monastery of the Capuchins, to consult his well tried, and ever kindly old friend.

CHAPTER IX.

TOWARD evening on the same day, Marco appeared in his uncle's study. He hardly ever visited him at this time, and the priest asked what brought him.

"I wanted to consult you, uncle," said Marco, rather nervously, so that the priest naturally expected to hear his nephew had got into some fresh scrape, and told him to make a clean breast of it and tell him all.

"It is nothing, uncle, at least nothing of that sort," he stopped short and then went on. "It is nothing that will displease you, uncle. I am sick of my unsettled, wild life, and I want a wife."

"A wife! that's soon said and soon done," replied the priest, surprised, "but then she has got to be fed, and how do you propose to do that?"

He reclined in his easy chair, his white hands grasping the arms, and his feet in the dainty buckled

shoes crossed one over the other. Marco stood awkwardly before him.

"Sir," he said, "it is not the first time I have thought of it. Stella—"

"Oh, you want to marry Stella, do you?" interrupted the old man, with a smile of satisfaction.

"Yes! That's what I have had in my head ever since the first day Padre Eusebio took me to Giambattista's house; that's why I worked with the old fellow, and resolved to become an *apparatore*, if nothing else turned up; although it is not exactly the trade, Sir, for one who through your kindness was five years at school, and who understands riding and driving and hunting, and many other things that can only be learned in the service of the nobility."

"And Stella, what does she say?"

"I don't think she will say 'no.'"

"You think? Do you mean to say you have never asked her?"

"Why Sir, it was quite impossible to speak to her alone. The old man and Lippo never let her out of their sight, and the other day when she at last got them to take her out to the festa, you couldn't get near her for the foreigners that swarmed round her,

offering to paint her and to pay her I don't know how much if she would stand as their model."

"It would suit you, I suppose," said Don Matteo severely, "to have a wife who kept you by her work, as your mother did her husband. The time is past for that kind of thing. See that you help yourself first."

Marco was inclined to fire up at this advice, but restrained himself seeing that the priest was lost in meditation. He had a great deal more confidence in Stella than in his nephew, who, he had learnt from long experience, was not to be trusted. As he turned the question over in his mind he asked Marco why he did not speak.

"Because you imply I would take a wife and let other people hold her cheap. Woe to any man who laid a finger on her! But you have said yourself, that to sit for sacred pictures, is an occupation which God himself approves; and if I became an apparatore, or any of the other things I have thought of, there would be no harm in accepting her help—or if you got me a post in the Princess' household, as you easily might, a clever girl like Stella would be sure of a place there too. And if now and then I took her

to the painters myself, what disgrace would there be in that? And you, uncle, would know everything, because you are her father confessor."

He had spoken warmly, and the priest did not interrupt him. It was clear that Marco was in earnest, and that he had considered the subject; and the prospect of seeing the young man happily united to a good sensible girl, and of hearing constantly from her of his doings and manner of life, which he certainly would do in the confessional, was not an unpleasant one. But he was determined not to promise him anything then. He drew out his watch, shook his head almost reproachfully, and rose from his chair with the remark, that he still had some more sick people to visit.

"As for you," he said, "all your life long you have first liked and then hated so many things, that any new fancy that may enter your head can have no weight. We will just see how long this one lasts."

So saying, he took his hat from the table and prepared to go out.

"But," began Marco, "if Stella—"

"If Stella tells me that she and her grandparents are quite willing, then we will talk more about it. For the present let us drop the subject."

Marco held open the door for his uncle, as he had learnt to do in the Prince's house, and followed him respectfully down the stairs. Then with a friendly "au revoir" he was dismissed. So for the present the affair was at a standstill and Marco's wishes no nearer their fulfilment.

A few days later Padre Eusebio, who went constantly to inquire for Stella and to talk about her to the old couple, proceeded from the Piazza Rusticucci to St. Peter's to perform his devotions before the statue of St. Peter. When he had finished them and was descending the steps to the Piazza, he chanced to come upon the priest Don Matteo, whom he had not seen since the funeral. He greeted him obsequiously. Don Matteo stopped.

"How are you, Padre Eusebio? Have you been to see little Stella?" he asked, "she came to confession yesterday, and Filippo also. When the young see death for the first time—for of her mother's death she remembers nothing—they feel it keenly for a while. But, like everything else, we get used to it as we grow older. Where will she live now?"

"She is going to make her home with her grand-

mother, my sister who wants some help in the house. It would be impossible to let her live by herself."

"Of course, of course. Young people, whether lads or girls, want an eye over them and a firm hand. My nephew was allowed to be too much his own master while his mother was alive. Under my care he has improved. It is a pity too, for him, that Gianbattista was taken, just when he was getting on so well with him and the work."

While they conversed, the priest had led the way through the colonnade on the left side of the square into the Cortile di San Damaso, through which there is an approach to the cancelleria and museums. This inner court was warm with the autumn sunshine which flooded it.

With slow and stately steps, Don Matteo paced up and down, chatting gaily, his silver snuff box in his hand. He inquired tenderly for his Eminence the Cardinal's health, and asked after his friends in the Monastery. Padre Eusebio in all humility gave him the desired information. Suddenly the priest stood still, and watched the large flocks of pigeons as they flew from the ground to the summit of the gigantic

buildings, from thence into the Pope's gardens, and then went soaring up again into the cloudless blue sky. "Extraordinary," he ejaculated, as if a thought had just struck him. "Why doesn't Filippo have her himself."

"Is your Reverence speaking of Stella?" asked Eusebio.

"Yes, I am. She is pretty to look at, neat in her person, pious and pure, and a good housewife. She kept everything clean and comfortable for her father and Filippo, and she has been his model since she was a baby in arms. He must be thinking of having a wife some day, surely."

The Padre shrugged his shoulders. "It seems to me nothing will come of that," he said, "although I am convinced it is not Filippo's fault. Meanwhile—what can we do?"

"Nothing! for heaven arranges love affairs! and yet it is as well to settle a girl in life and give her the protection of a husband as soon as possible, unless she feels inclined for the life of the cloister. There can be no lack of demand for such fine ripe fruit. But whom would you have her choose? you and

I have a very high opinion of Filippo, and many agree with us, for he is a good fellow and a clever artist, a very clever artist, and will do still greater things yet. The Princess Roccaforte, to whom I recommended him to execute the *Sposalizio* in the chapel she has erected as a memorial of her conversion, sets much store on his talent, and is charmed with his quiet modesty and earnestness."

"Stella knows his worth too," said the Padre. "She depends on him and consults him in everything. They would have stayed with each other altogether, if they could have done so without losing their good reputation. Of course it was out of the question unless she became his wife, and—"

"And she is young," said the priest, again taking the lead in the conversation, "and Filippo is a good bit older, is sober and grave, has not ruddy cheeks and doesn't look inclined for dancing or any youthful frolics. He is not to blame for it either. She would like a great sturdy quick-blooded fellow, who would give her something to think about and something to bear; and she will get him too. Has the girl's father left her anything?"

“Not a very large legacy, although he was industrious and thrifty. A couple of hundred scudi, or a little more perhaps, the furniture, and the stuffs and finery he let out on hire to churches and chapels which were too poor to keep their own. All that will be moved to her grandfather’s house. It will be something to set up house with when she does marry. And what my brother-in-law the worthy tinman possesses, will be hers too.”

The priest listened attentively. “Indeed!” he said. “Well it is something! I am glad you take so much interest in my little penitent. Her parents were good people, both Cleofa and Gianbattista; honest people and good Christians,—the Lord rest their souls. You too, Padre Eusebio, are a good and upright man and an affectionate guardian: his Eminence your General says so and praises your excellent qualities.”

Eleven struck from the clock-tower. The priest had gleaned all that he had wanted to know and could now dismiss Eusebio. “I have business in the cancelleria,” he said, “and later have to go up to the Palazzo Roccaforte to visit the Princess.”

The Padre bowed low in deference to the man

who talked of business in His Holiness' court and of visiting princes.

“Au revoir, Padre Eusebio!” said the priest. “Don't hurry Stella into wedlock. Wait till she has got over her sorrow. Sorrow is an evil counsellor. Bright eyes see plainer than tearful ones, and no one should marry in tears. She will be well cared for by the old people, and I have my eye over her, and my ears open to her in the confessional. Au revoir!”

The priest entered the cancelleria with an air of importance, the Padre returning to his sister's house. Although neither the priest nor the Capuchin had mentioned Marco's name, they understood each other; and the Padre was more pleased, than he thought it necessary to admit, at the prospect of a relationship with Don Matteo. Apart from any personal advantage from it—which might or might not arise—it was plain that, if so great a man was gracious enough to drop a hint about the welfare of one he was interested in, it was only right for him, his servant, to take it and act upon it. Of course it would be his sacred duty to fulfil the instructions of one, who was at home in such very high places,

as the priest. It was not for his own sake but for Stella's, and because it was, he believed, God's will, that he would take the course Don Matteo suggested if it were possible to do so.

CHAPTER X.

A WEEK later, everything had been arranged satisfactorily.

Filippo had taken up his abode in the room near his studio, the old clerk had given up his lodging in the tinman's house. Stella, with her little altar, her birds and plants, and all her goods and chattels, had come to live with her grandparents; and the old faded sign-board, which had hung over the door of the old home for forty years with the name of the skilled and honest Apparatore upon it, was now taken down. A notice was stuck up instead, to inform the public that the house was to let.

"The Piazza Rusticucci isn't like the same place to me now the sign-board is gone from our door, and I cannot see the dome of St. Peter's from my window," said Stella dolefully. "I don't know myself in the new room. It is just as if I were in a strange land, with Lippo gone and so many changes!" She

did not get over her sorrow as soon as they expected. She was only sixteen, and at that age misfortunes are not supposed to strike very deeply; but then no one understood how complete was the change in her life.

Since her childhood, she had been mistress in her father's house. She had done what she liked in the four rooms and in the yard, where there was plenty of space and air and sunshine. Now she was ordered about by her old grandparents from morning to night, and what she would have done willingly enough at home was now a burden to her because she could never be certain of giving satisfaction. That dainty cleanliness which had become almost a necessity and second nature to her was out of the question here. Everything was grimy and no one seemed to mind. In the old days, when she had spent a few hours with her grandmother, the fumes of charcoal and smoke from the tinman's workshop had not troubled her. Now that she had to exist in the impure atmosphere, it oppressed her, and she felt sometimes as if she could not breathe. She missed the cheerful sunny yard and the shady arbour where she used to pass most of her time;

and, as she sat in the room allotted to her and looked out on the smoky dark little yard, or kept her granny company in the dreary parlour, she pictured to herself the ivy-covered wall of the old yard with the puffy-cheeked Triton's head in the middle, from which the water dropped into the basin below with a merry splash, where summer and winter the delicate maiden-hair flourished on its red-brown stalk in fresh green luxuriance. All was dingy and dull in her present home, and Stella thought her mother must have found it so, and had married a man old enough to be her father, just that she might get away from the eternal smell of charcoal, and have the pleasant house and pretty courtyard all to herself.

Her father had always come to table clean and neat, for his work had demanded clean hands, and Lippo had been quite the Signor with his stories about Milordo and Nilo and other artists. Her grandfather, his assistants and his apprentice, took their meals in any fashion, and Stella relished nothing she eat or drank when it was handed to her by smutty hands. She took no interest in preparing dishes now that her father was not there to taste them, or Filippo to say that she was a splendid cook, and that he got

nothing so good in the Via della Croce restaurants. Seldom indeed had he been to see her since he had gone to live in the Via Margutta and she had come to her grandparents' house.

Marco's visits on the contrary had been much more frequent than in Gianbattista's lifetime, and he had no excuse for coming to the old people's house, as he certainly did not entertain the idea of learning the tin-trade. Nevertheless they welcomed him warmly, although Padre Eusebio had not told his sister anything definite of the conversation which he had had with Don Matteo, for the good reason that the priest himself had not said anything definite.

But the old granddame spun out her thoughts as well as her yarn, as she sat in the big chair with her spinning wheel before her, till at last she became confused as to what she had really heard and what she had invented. The idea of a relationship with a reverend gentleman like Don Matteo, the priest of the parish, was as pleasing to her as to Padre Eusebio. She told her husband that it would not be such a bad thing for them, if the priest, who had so many grand connections, were to come in and out of their house; he would be sure to know of people in the Vatican,

St. Peter's, and the palaces who would patronize the tin-trade, and give orders perhaps that would make their fortune. Accordingly the old man not given to hospitality as a rule, had a bottle of wine ready for Marco at any moment. He liked the youth; and, as Marco had nothing definite to do in the Palace, he went about in the town and knew all that was going on, and always had something new and droll to relate when he sat down to cards with the old man, while his wife went into fits of laughter at his wit.

In the middle of his play, if Stella chanced to be near at hand, he would take the opportunity of remarking, that his uncle the priest wanted to see him married, that he urged him to turn church apparatore, in which case he would need a wife with skilful fingers, or, if he did not do that, he wanted him to get a good place in the household of some high family. But he had no mind to be a servant all his life, neither did he care about the church business, indeed with a clever managing wife, there were lots of other things which a man could do, much more profitable and pleasant, and so he had told his uncle.

He had learned to use his pen to some purpose in

the Palazzo Roccaforte, and had moreover been in distinguished company in the hunting field and when he had gone out with shooting parties, and he would rather go into some business which would not disgrace a priest's nephew. He thought of taking a large house and letting apartments somewhere near St. Peter's, and always went to the eating-house over there at the corner, because the ecclesiastics dined there. He had made several acquaintances among them, and they had promised him their patronage and put much confidence in him, and, as to the rest, well, he would soon manage that. If his reverend uncle did not know much of the ways of the world and how to earn money, he would teach him. The priest had no other belongings in the world but him; and, if he married, he would be bound to bestow something more than a bare blessing.

One evening when he had spoken to this effect, Stella's grandmother remarked: "The thing of course is to get the right wife, a thrifty girl with two or three useful possessions and a few hundred scudi or so to set up housekeeping with." At this Marco laughed, till his white teeth flashed beneath his great moustache, and cast long and loving glances at Stella, who as usual had her back turned to him.

“What do you think, Padrona?” he asked, “ought I to be long finding her? A fellow with connections and patrons like mine! Men like me are not as common as flies. There are ten girls who would have taken me long ago, if there is one! Only I didn’t choose to bind myself hand and foot. And what women they were too! One was a real Marchesa, she fell desperately in love with my broad shoulders, and used to make eyes at me till she set my blood on fire?”

Stella looked over her shoulder at him. “Why didn’t you marry her then?” she asked, tired of his bragging.

“Because she was not so young and fair as the one who is my choice,” he answered rising from his chair.

“Who knows whether she likes you, this ‘choice’ of yours, how do you know you will get the girl you want?”

“And how do *you* know you will get the man *you* want,” he retorted as if in jest, although his colour had risen and his eyes flashed angrily. “I am not rash; I shall wait my time. Rome was not built in a day; one must have patience to gain one’s object,

especially when a capricious woman is in the question."

Stella turned away from him. Neither she nor Filippo had ever liked Marco, and only for the priest's sake had they been civil to him when he had come to Gianbattista's house.

The last time Filippo had called at her grandparents', he had found Marco there, and Stella thought it put him out, for he had let a whole week pass without coming again. But now, just when Marco was in the full swing of conversation, Filippo came in as if he were in a great hurry. He just said good evening to the old people, nodded to Marco carelessly, and asked Stella how she was; then, without being prevailed upon to sit down or take a glass of wine, he hastened to the door.

Stella was sure Marco's presence was the cause of his speedy departure. Yet she could not ask him to stay; for since she had refused to be his wife there had not been the same freedom of intercourse between them. She had given up her old right in him, she could not beg him to stay with her now as she would once have done; besides, he never could stand the charcoal atmosphere, and her

grandparents had often scoffed at him for being so particular, and said they supposed he was born to be a prince, or how could he have come by such oversensitiveness and fine notions? The old woman, especially, knew what pain these words inflicted, thus there was no love lost between them.

Stella went out to the door with him. As they stood there together, and he gave her his hand, she asked when he would come again.

“I don’t know. Don’t expect me,” he said. “For probably we may not see each other again for some time. To-morrow I start for the Campagna.”

“Out to the Campagna now? What for? Are the others going with you?”

“No, they are not,” he answered her. “I alone have business out there. You remember that once before the Padrone died, the Princess Roccaforte sent for me, because the priest had been good enough to recommend me to her?”

“I remember; you were to paint a picture for her Church,” said Stella.

“Yes, their Highnesses are gone out to the villa, and I must see the chapel, take the measurements, and

show the designs I have made according to their wishes."

"But you will come back soon?" she asked, feeling uneasy at something in Filippo's manner.

"I don't know; very likely not. If I get the commission I shall only come back for a few days; or at any rate, if the work will be a great undertaking and it will keep me away for a long time." He broke off, then added, "and even if the altar painting doesn't come to anything, I shall go away from Rome, whatever happens."

"Before you have finished your S. Theresa?" she inquired anxiously.

"I shall take it with me and finish it elsewhere."

"Without me?" she asked more and more astonished and hurt.

"Yes, without you!" There was a long pause. A feeling of shyness prevented her asking more questions. At last he seized her hand.

"Listen!" he said, "I can't stay, because I can't get over the pain you gave me when you said you wouldn't have me for your husband. Every time I look at you my heart aches, and that is why I must go away. For as long as I stay here I cannot help

coming to see you, and afterwards I feel wild because you do not love me."

His words made her sad and cross at the same time, for this love that she could not share was beginning to torment her. "Why must it be I?" she exclaimed. "Cannot you love somebody else? There's Nina, she is honest and pretty too, and I know she is fond of you."

"A man cannot love just whom and how he would, he is taken by surprise, and in love before he knows it."

The truth of these words flashed across her. She caught her breath and could hardly repress a cry; then deeply moved, she laid her hand on Lippo's shoulder. "I beseech you!" she said in a low voice that stirred the depths of his soul, for it was a very different tone in which she had made the same request the day he had proposed to her, "I do beseech you not to think of me any more in that way!"

"True love does not forget so easily. I want to think no more about it, but if I see you I cannot help it, so I had better go away and see you no more. Farewell!"

She stood irresolute, then held him back. "I do like you!" said she, "I am your friend!"

"That is no good. Farewell!" he said stiffly.

"Lippo, don't go! I pray you not to desert me! Think, to what you are leaving me! They want me to—"

She felt his hand tremble as she spoke, but he mastered himself and said, "Padre Eusebio and the grandparents mean well by you, but they are all old and won't live for ever."

She took no notice of this. "Even if you don't come to see me," she said humbly, "let me know that you are in the town and that I can find you when I want help. Whom have I got besides you? I am so alone in the world."

Her sweet voice and his great love conquered him. "You are more cruel than you think," he said, "I will try, I will come again. So, goodbye for the present!"

She gazed after him as far as she could in the faint glimmer of the street lamps, then went into her room and sat pondering in the dark. She did not know what to do with herself, or what to make of things. It was the same the next day and the next; she had no joy or interest in life, and at night she could not rest.

She meant as well by Filippo as the grand-parents

and Eusebio did by her. But he would not understand her. If he thought she could ever get to like Marco, whom she now did not care for, why could not he take a fancy to some one else and marry her. Then there would be no harm in her living with him again, she would be his model once more for nothing, and he should have all she earned by sitting to Nilo and Milordo.

But Filippo was right when he said that we cannot love whom we will and how we will, and that love takes us by surprise! Of this thought she could not rid herself, whether in her room or at work, and it troubled her! As for poor Filippo he was not much better off!

CHAPTER XI.

FILIPPO had yielded to Stella's wishes in the hope that he might cure himself of his love for her. He had postponed his journey and tried to accustom himself to other models, but he was not successful. There was no lack of pretty maidens and finely developed women, but he could make nothing of them. The dark flashing eyes had not Stella's guileless, steadfast gaze, no forehead was pure and white as hers, no mouth smiled so sweetly and serenely. While he tried to forget her, he was thinking of her all the more; and when he went to his easel, weary of the strange models, to work on one of the numerous sketches he had made from Stella, it got mixed up somehow with other features and he found that he could create nothing and think of nothing but of her whom he was trying to banish from his thoughts.

His friends saw he had something on his mind, and often asked him what made him so low-spirited;

to avoid replying, he avoided them. He took his meals irregularly and went long walks without asking them to accompany him. From Stella he kept away feeling that as long as he was within reach of her he could have no peace of mind, and so one day suddenly bade his friends good-bye, and set out for the Prince's villa in the Campagna.

All this time Stella had heard or seen nothing of him though day after day she lived in the hope of seeing him. At length just when her patience was exhausted an opportunity of learning something of Filippo offered itself. She was sitting one morning with her grandmother before the door. The old woman was knitting as usual and Stella was sewing a remnant of her father's gold braid round the square opening of a violet dress. She was obliged to do something to pass the time; and she wished to have everything in readiness when Filippo came to his senses at last and summoned her to sit to him as a model and to the others.

As they were thus employed, Chiaruccia came by on her way to her day's work. She had on a crimson skirt and a pretty apron hanging over her arm, for she had

to sit to-day in her two best costumes. With a smile and a nod she stopped at the tinman's door.

The old woman responded cheerfully to her greeting, and asked where she was going. She had known her parents in better days, and thought much of the girl who in spite of her dangerous trade maintained an irreproachable character.

"I am going, as I do the first thing every morning, to Nilo in the Via Margutta," she answered. "If you have any message for Lippo, I will take it, or anything you have to send him."

The old woman said she thought there was nothing, but Stella jumped up eagerly.

"There is no message for him," she exclaimed, "but I will go with you! I must see him and speak to him, and I must know what he is doing."

Her grandmother could hardly believe her ears. "You want to go gadding out, you say?" she screamed, "alone with Chiaruccia? Your grandfather is not at home; and without his permission you shall not stir from the house."

Stella felt that her point was only to be gained by asserting herself with decision and boldness. "What do you mean by saying I have no right to go where I

choose without permission, or without my grandfather at my elbow?" she exclaimed angrily. "Don't I go every day to the butcher and baker and greengrocer. Then, I might go where I liked, and how could you prevent me? If I had a mind I could go *anywhere* between my errands. What would you do if some day I went and never came back? Ever since I could walk I have been allowed to run about our square alone, and for years I was trusted at home to look after the house by myself. I have no father and mother to go anywhere with me, and you, grandmother, can hardly hobble to church. Am I to sit for ever in the parlour, swallowing the smoke? I am not going into a convent, but grandfather shall not say to me again, as he did yesterday, that a woman who doesn't marry is a useless burden in a family. I told Lippo when my dear father's eyes were closed, that I would take nothing from anybody. And when I stand as a model to Lippo he will pay me, and then I will pay you, and not be indebted to you anymore. If Chiaruccia can do it, why can't I? We were always Filippo's models, mother and I, and God knows I am respectable and honest. But no Christian can be made a slave of and tied up like a dog; and even a dog

when he can't bear it any longer breaks loose and runs away."

The old woman flew into a passion, and sprang up as quickly as her old swollen feet would allow her, to aim a blow at the rebellious girl, screaming to the apprentice to take Stella by force and to lock her up in the parlour. Stella declared that no one should come near her or lay hands on her, and threw herself sobbing and crying into Chiaruccia's arms.

Chiaruccia was sorry for her. At the same time a feeling of triumph rose within her at the idea of Stella longing to earn her bread as model, when she had often so haughtily looked down upon her trade. Besides this, if she took Stella to Nilo, he would pay her the extra he had promised her; for his word was to be depended upon, so she would be doing herself as well as Stella a good turn.

"Go on crying! as loud as you can!" she whispered to her, "I will get round her!" then turning to the enraged grandmother, she said: "Now see what you have done! I could have told you long ago how it would be, when she lived over yonder with her father. You have been shutting her up, just as Marietta's old aunt shut her up, and the end of it will be the

same! I know it for a certainty! If I had had to sit at home all day like Stella, I should have gone mad long ago, as Maria did, and thrown myself into the Tiber! What can you expect? It was not the poor girl's fault; it was her blood! When one's blood gets no exercise it must rush to one's head. I should feel frantic directly, if I had nothing to do.—Is she to cry her eyes out? Must she spend her whole life sitting here day after day? Take care that she does not go crazy like Marietta—God have mercy on her soul—and that they don't drag her out of the Tiber one day and bring her back to you dead. What would you say then? Let her go, let her have her own way for once. I will bring her back at dinner time, and then she will be calmer. Come child, make haste, I have no time to waste!”

The angry old dame stood confounded, she had not a word more to say. Stella said she must put on better clothes, but as Chiaruccia said she could not wait, she went quickly upstairs and only put on her silver comb, her heavy earrings and corals and the gold cross, Filippo's last present to her. With deft fingers she arranged over her dress her best kerchief trimmed with old church lace. Chiaruccia caught it down for

her behind in wide folds, so that the pretty neck was not hidden, and then, without waiting to say more to the old woman, the two girls hastened out through the work-shop into the square, Chiaruccia laughing merrily at having got her way, and Stella half frightened and yet pleased at her own unwonted boldness.

Walking briskly, for Chiaruccia had to be punctual at her appointments, they pursued their way unnoticed, chatting gaily till they reached the streets inhabited by artists and foreigners. Here Chiaruccia was, as other models were, a well-known figure, although in those days the national dress was worn by all Roman maidens and not by models only. Stella, however, had never been seen before in the streets; and she attracted universal attention.

She was not unconscious of the admiration she excited, and it gave her pleasure; for since the afternoon at the Vigne she had become vain and proud of her beauty. She beamed with delight when she heard one passer-by say to another that she was lovely, or when people smiled at her and turned round to look at her, again; as they came out of the Via della Croce into the Piazza di Spagna they met a handsome young Dane, whose costume, camp stool and other parapher-

nalìa showed he was an artist going off to paint in the open air. He asked Chiaruccia who it was with her.

“If I am not mistaken,” said he “this is the original of Filippo Mai’s pictures.”

“Yes, of course it is,” replied Chiaruccia, while Stella stood too much abashed to speak a word, “she has been his model, since she was a baby, for he lived with her parents, and she understands the work as well as I do. To-day she is going with me to Nilo’s for the first time.”

“So you are to be had, are you?” asked the Dane, taking out his pocketbook and turning over the leaves. “Can you come to me this week? Are you disengaged at nine o’clock on Wednesday?”

Stella hesitated. “I must ask, I think not,” she said: “Grandfather — Filippo may not let me go.”

“Does Santo keep you for himself only?” asked the Dane laughing. “It is a positive sin if he does.”

“He has no right to keep her for himself,” chimed in Chiaruccia, “for he doesn’t live with her now, her father is dead—Heaven rest his soul—he broke his neck in San Lucca three weeks ago.” Leave it to me, Sir! I will bring her to you, and if she can’t come,

I will come Wednesday at nine o'clock! A rivederla Signore!"

"Very well: A riverderla then," repeated the Dane, then taking Stella's hand he asked, "What is your name, my pretty one, and where do you live, so that I may find you out if Chiaruccia should chance to forget?"

"What, Signore? Have I ever forgotten what I have once promised?" cried Chiaruccia, indignant at any doubt being cast on her capacity for business. "I am a girl whose word can be depended upon. Leave it to me!" and taking Stella by the arm she left him without the desired information.

In a few minutes they were in the Via Margutta, at the house where the three friends worked. Lame old Pietro, the porter, knew Stella, for he had seen her on the few occasions she had come there with her father, who had paid more frequent visits, and of whose untimely death he had heard, as it had made Filippo take up his abode in the Via Margutta altogether. He began to make his condolences and to ask particulars of the accident, but Chiaruccia again would not allow Stella time to answer questions.

"Another time! another time!" she exclaimed, "we

must go up directly. Yes, if money could be earned without working, the world would be a paradise; but one can't live on talk, so make haste on! It is nearly half past nine, and Nilo and the Santo will be waiting."

"He is not here, he has gone away," Pietro informed her.

"Gone away, without a word of good-bye?" exclaimed Stella aghast. "Where is he gone? When will he come back?"

But Chiaruccia again interfered. "Come along, do. Il Nilo will know more about it than Pietro," she said, taking Stella's arm, and as they mounted the stone stair-case between massive walls gray with age she added, "There, you see! They are all alike. When they get hold of great people, they are no longer to be depended upon. Lippo is not different from other men. He plays the Signor with you, promises you work, and then makes off without a word. Trust none of them, I tell you. If you give them an inch they take an ell and more. It is wisest to keep them at a distance. They pay Grazia best, who lives up there in Santa Susanna. She works with the Frenchman in the Villa Medici and will end in marrying

him, they say. Had I a chance of Marco as you have, I wouldn't think of any one else."

Having delivered herself thus, she knocked four times with the heavy knocker on the little door studded with iron nails, of studio number two. A deep bass voice said, "Come in." As soon as Adalbert saw who accompanied his model, he threw down his palette and brush, and came to meet Stella with both his large hands outstretched.

"Bravo! bravo! I am glad that you've come at last. You are sensible, Stella, to let yourself be persuaded to come. Why should you be tied to apron strings like a small child? You are old enough to judge for yourself what you ought to do and what you ought not to do. You deserve great praise, Chiaruccia, for bringing her to me."

"Indeed, Signore, it gave me a deal of trouble," replied Chiaruccia. Adalbert was too much engrossed with Stella to pay any attention to this remark.

"Per Bacco, child," he exclaimed. "You have made yourself look lovelier than ever to-day. What a neck, what shoulders!" His face shone with delight in her beauty, and he boldly drew aside her white kerchief,

so that her fair young bosom gleamed between the gold lacing of her tightfitting red bodice.

Stella started back flushing crimson. "How dare you touch me!" she cried, and there was a flash of anger in her eyes as she flung the old Roman: "non si tocca" at him. "I have not come here to see you. I won't be your model. No never! It is Filippo I want," she added as she made for the door full of shame. Chiaruccia herself opened it for her, for she knew Stella's moods.

Adalbert saw the mistake he had made. "Pardon, child!" he said; "it shall not happen again. But remember how beautiful you are! Filippo is gone away."

"I know that," said Stella.

"Then where are you going?"

"I will wait downstairs with Pietro," she answered, still angry, in spite of his praise of her beauty.

"It is cold down on the ground floor. But do as you please!" said Chiaruccia, who had become suddenly displeased at the turn things had taken. "What will you do down there? I shall not be ready for two hours. But where is the Santo gone, Signor?"

Stella lingered to hear the answer to this question; but Adalbert disappointed her. "Let us begin work

at once," he said; "you are late enough as it is." He took up his brush and palette again, and went to his easel. Chiaruccia stood before the mirror and arranged a gay frieze handkerchief on her black curls, then retired behind the heavy curtain, which is never missing in a large studio, to put on her sandals, after which she turned up her white sleeves, and placed herself in her accustomed attitude, her arm raised to support the heavy copper *conca* on her head, which was turned a little to one side.

Adalbert compared her position with the picture, altered this and that fold in her dress, told her to look a little more to the left, to stretch the fingers of the hand that supported the *conca* more firmly, and very soon he had apparently forgotten Stella in his painting. Meanwhile the poor child stood irresolute at the door. The various impressions of the morning, the fright and shame she had just experienced, harassed and confused her. She had boasted that morning to her grandmother that she was as well able to manage and look after herself as Chiara, who was six or seven years her senior; but now she saw that this was not so easy. She felt shy at the thought of going home alone through the long,

crowded streets. She was afraid of her grandfather's scolding and still more afraid of what Filippo would think of her adventure. She kept near to the now closed door, without knowing what to do. Whether accidentally or intentionally, Adalbert did not speak a single word, and Chiaruccia of course did not move.

At last Stella sat down on an old chest near the entrance of the studio, and looked about her. The walls were thickly covered, from top to bottom, with sketches and studies of all styles of art. Clothed and naked figures of men and women, landscapes, fancy heads, portraits of priests and foreigners, were hung with no regard to order. Not far from the window she saw her own picture as St. Cecilia, which Lippo had painted; at the time it was done, it had been sent a long way from Rome, and she could not help smiling at meeting it again in this strange place among all the strange pictures. It was beautiful! Padre Eusebio had told her once that beauty was a divine gift, the reward of virtue, and that to be painted for pictures dedicated to the service of God, was the Lord's especial favour to those who were pious as well as beautiful.

In Nilo's studio all was as airy and quiet as in the room in her father's house where Filippo had painted her. Nothing stirred, only the click of the sculptor's chisel in another studio, was borne up on the soft air from the court below.

It was much pleasanter here than at her grandparents'. Her conscience however was not at rest and she felt afraid of Nilo; yet she thought she would like to see the great picture for the German Count in which Adalbert had wanted to paint her, in beautiful clothes; and she *must* know what had taken Filippo away so suddenly, and when he was coming back.

"Signore," she said at last gently and timidly, "where is Filippo gone?"

Adalbert was now really engrossed in his work. He told her briefly that he was gone up to the Hills.

"To the Palazzo? to the Princess?" she asked.

Adalbert nodded assent. Chiaruccia came to her friend's help. "Is this Princess young and beautiful?" she asked.

"Of course!" said Adalbert. "You know her. The tall, fair English lady, who married Prince Salvatore, and who came here with him the other day."

“Ah, I know! She is slender and has golden hair, and is a relation of Milordo. Don Matteo converted her, and she is a good Catholic now!”

“Yes, and directly after her marriage she made a vow that all her English money should go to the building of a great chapel near her castle, as a sign that she was no heretic, but as good a Catholic as you or I. Filippo is to paint a great picture for this chapel: The marriage of the Virgin. But”—added he laughing—“the birth of the Saviour would be a more suggestive subject, for she has no children, poor thing! although she has been married five years and has prayed daily for one. Naturally the Prince, who is no chicken himself, longs for an heir.”

“I expect heretics do not pray properly,” said Chiaruccia. “She will get what she wants when she has learnt to pray as we do.”

Stella had been listening earnestly. “Heretic?” she said at last. “Are not the English Christians then?”

“The English, Christians?” cried Chiara, who delighted in airing her superior knowledge of the world to her more innocent friend. “Christians? What can

you mean? They are heretics! Worse heretics than Jews and heathens!"

"All of them?" asked Stella.

"Everyone of them, I assure you, Stella, and if they don't get converted, as the Princess was by the priest, they will be damned eternally and go to hell."

"Oh good heavens!" cried Stella horror-struck, clasping her hands.

At the same moment there was a knock at the door. Adalbert went to open it. The Prince and Princess who had returned to Rome the night before, came in, and Wilfrid, whose studio they had been visiting, accompanied them, while Filippo followed close behind them.

Before Adalbert had time to receive his distinguished guests and greet his friends, and before either Filippo or Wilfrid were aware of Stella's presence, (for the door had swung back and concealed her,) she rushed forwards, and, moved by an uncontrollable impulse, seizing Wilfrid's hand, asked: "You are a Christian? You, Signore, are not a heretic? Say you are not!"

The situation was as painful as it was unexpected,

for the Princess might naturally conclude that her conversion had been the subject of discussion.

Wilfrid had some difficulty in controlling his feelings, so bewitched was he with Stella's beauty and so enraptured with this evidence of her gradually unfolding love. Filippo, on the other hand, at the sight of Stella in Adalbert's studio, fell into a frenzy of jealous rage.

"What are you doing here, you wicked girl? are not you ashamed to be here? are you lost to all sense of honour? What do you mean by visiting strangers alone in this way?" he asked, choking with anger, while he seized her wrist with such force that she shrank from him in pain, and, unused to such harshness, tried in vain to set herself free.

"Leave her alone and take care what you say to her!" interposed Wilfrid passionately, as he tried to get Stella away from him. Filippo loosened his hold on her, but it was she who was now excited and indignant.

"Don't touch me, either of you!" she said. "I did not come to see Nilo. I came to ask after Lippo because I thought he was ill. And he *may* be ill now for all I care! He is not my father or my brother

either. He shall not order me about and scold me. I will do as I please. And as I have come here to-day, I will come to you to-morrow, if you wish it, Signore. He shall not interfere! I will have nothing more to do with him!"

This little by-play went on so quickly that Adalbert and the Prince, as they stood in front of the great picture discussing its merits, hardly took in what had passed between Stella and the other two men. But it had not escaped the Princess' searching eye and quick ear, neither had the whole scene been lost on Chiaruccia; as her work was now at an end, she put down the copper jug and joined Stella, who had retired weeping bitterly behind the door where the curtain hid her from view.

"Never mind!" she whispered. "He is in love you know, and people in love never have any sense."

"What does it matter! If I don't love him!" Stella said pouting, then repenting, she recalled her words. "I mean I love him, yes, of course, I love him, but I won't marry him! I love—"

"Be quiet! I know all!" said Chiaruccia to

her. "Do you suppose I kept my eyes shut that afternoon in the Vigne? But don't cry. There is water to bathe your eyes! See, he is looking round at you! Red eyes are ugly, and if you are ugly, how can he love you! Do stop crying and look at him!"

Stella lifted her face from her hands and met the eyes of the man she loved, who had been drawn into conversation with the others by the Princess. Her tears dried under the spell of his loverlike gaze, as the raindrops on the petals of a rose are dried by the first sunbeam after a shower.

The three painters and their noble guests were occupied with the landscape, which Adalbert had hoisted on his easel for their inspection. The Prince, who was an accomplished art critic, praised the picture warmly. He remarked that, at the first glance, only the reality of the landscape made itself felt; for the eye rested on it before it noticed the figures, which nevertheless were significant and attractive accessories. Recognizing Chiaruccia as the original of one of the Roman lady's waiting women, he turned to look at her more attentively.

The Princess followed his example, and as if she

had been unconscious of Stella's presence before, she exclaimed in a tone of pleased astonishment, "Why, there is the beautiful girl whom you, Signor Filippo, consider your especial property and exclusive model. But she goes to other artists after all, then."

"Of course!" said Adalbert, who hoped this would be an opportunity of overcoming Stella's scruples. "I expect she will give me a sitting to-morrow or the day after, and what does your Highness think? Won't she do admirably for the second waiting-woman in my picture."

"No Signore! no lady! no!" interposed Stella, her colour rising. "I am not his model and never will be, and he knows it, for I have told him so before. And I told Filippo that I only came with Chiaruccia to ask after him. But—" she stopped.

Filippo stood with a gloomy expression on his face. He saw that he had done Stella a bitter injustice. She was still the same truthful, outspoken, affectionate creature, and by mistrusting her in a moment of jealous frenzy, he told himself he had lost her for ever. He could not speak, his heart was sore and his eyes so full of burning tears, that he saw everything through a

mist. The Princess was charmed with the girl's fresh and natural manner, she drew nearer her and said:

"What were you going to say, when you broke off so suddenly?"

Stella cast down her eyes. "Nothing, lady! nothing!"

"Nothing? That is hardly true, my child! When we are going to say nothing, we don't come out with such an emphatic 'but.' Come, finish what you were saying. You won't do Signor Adalbert a favour, but whom?"

"Filippo! and—and your relation, the Milordo, if he—" she stopped short again and turned to go; but the Princess who had taken a keen interest in the scene from the beginning, laid her hand on her shoulder, and said with a winning smile, "Don't be afraid to speak out. What is my cousin to do to gain your services?"

"He—" once more poor Stella hesitated, then, controlling herself with a tremendous effort, she said: "he must become a Christian, lady, like you."

No one had expected this. Adalbert laughed loudly. "Bravo, Stella!" he exclaimed. "That is what I call plain speaking, hitting the right nail on the

head. You are right, one shouldn't get mixed up with heretics. But ask your Santo if I am not as good a Christian as you and he are."

The Prince laughed too and began to jest in English with Adalbert and Wilfrid, about the part this beautiful child had unconsciously taken as missionary for the cure of Wilfrid's soul. Stella did not know which way to look, she was so bewildered when the laughter and foreign language fell upon her ear, and she wondered how she had caused such a sensation, and why they all looked at her, except Filippo who had turned his back on her. In fact, at such a time this conversation in a strange tongue was extremely distasteful to him.

The Princess acted with decision, as was her wont, she saw the whole situation clearly, and came to the aid of Stella and her two admirers.

"Never mind, my dear girl!" she said, stroking Stella's hot cheek. "You are quite right, you are a good, pious child. The poor heretics, and my cousin among them, are all to be pitied. Let us hope, that our Saviour will guide him, as He once did me into the bosom of our holy Church. We will pray that it may be so, we are all miserable sinners, all," she

paused for a moment, then continued, "But as you like working with your friend Filippo so much, and he likes it too, you shall come out with him to Roccaforte. He is going to paint the Blessed Virgin over my altar, from a sketch he made of you, and which he showed me the other day. If you are at hand he will be able to make it all the more beautiful. So you must come. You will enjoy the country air, and my old Peggy and sister Monica shall take care of you."

"Yes, I should like it," said Stella. She felt as if she were in a dream, and hardly realized what had been proposed to her.

The Princess had now become excited and lively,—she was always full of schemes and plans, and she was anxious to settle this one on the spot. She turned to Filippo, and, without consulting him, she said, "We will arrange it so, Signor Mai; you are to go out the day after to-morrow; to begin work and the girl—what's your name?"

"Stella," said the girl in a low, timid voice.

"Well, Stella shall follow you with Sister Monica, my school-children's mistress. She is here in her convent for a few days, and will be returning to Rocca-

forte shortly. She and my old English servant will be kind to her, I am sure. Mind you are ready, Stella. I shall send for you in about a fortnight."

Filippo's pride was wounded. He could not bear to have things decided for him and Stella in this authoritative way. As far as he was concerned, he had given his consent to begin his work in the next few days according to the Princess's wishes, but Stella was a different matter! He told the Princess that she was not dependent on herself or on him, so that neither of them was in a position to accept or refuse her Highness' gracious offer.

The Prince, although he was pleased with the part Filippo took in the matter and respected his scruples, could not approve of any opposition to the Princess's scheme.

"I should think," he said, "that as the parents always entrusted the girl to your care, and depended on your judgment and discretion, they would not have hesitated to do so in this case."

"Stella never entered a stranger's studio, and only mine now and then, in company with her father, who is now dead, your Highness! Although she is my

foster-sister, as I once had the honour to inform you."

"I know, I know it!" replied the Prince, "but it seems to me that the present guardians of the girl would not object to surrender her to the excellent protection which the Princess proposes to give her. At least you could easily persuade them to do so!"

Filippo was obliged to submit. He respectfully thanked the noble pair, and a few minutes later they took their leave of Adalbert and left the studio, accompanied by Filippo, and by Wilfrid whom the Princess had invited to spend the evening with her.

It was past the dinner-hour, so Chiaruccia put her things together, placed the *conca* in a corner, and got ready for the walk home through the streets. She then arranged with Adalbert about the next sitting. Stella was waiting at a little distance, restless and uneasy, when Filippo came back again. She expected him to speak to her, but he seemed preoccupied and quite unconscious of her presence.

Chiaruccia said she must be going, and Stella went up to Filippo and asked him gently if he would come home with her.

"No," he said gruffly; "go with Chiaruccia, I have something to say to Adalbert."

"Shall I really go out to Roccaforte to stay with you? I want to know for certain that I may tell them at home," said she.

"I must think it over," he replied, and then the two girls left the studio.

CHAPTER XII.

“How did Stella come here?” asked Filippo when he and Adalbert were alone.

“As she told you,” answered his friend, not in the least irritated by Filippo’s tone. “She came to inquire about you, for she evidently does not understand the game you are playing with her. If you understood German, I would tell you, in the words of one of our great poets, that such a face as that girl’s was meant to rejoice everybody’s eyes, just as our Creator meant the sun to be seen by the whole world, and not by one corner of it only. But you, with your jealousy and severity and ideas of seclusion, are driving this poor little Stella to the fate you really wish to preserve her from. Be warned in time!”

“You did not entice her here, then, because my back was turned?”

“I had said something to Chiaruccia that day in the Vigne, that it would be to her advantage, if she

brought Stella here one day, and when the two appeared this morning, I thought I was indebted to Chiara. But it seemed that Stella came of her own free will. She flatly refused to sit to me, and said she had come to look for you. It is plain enough that you avoided her purposely, to make her feel how dependent she is on you. That you are in love with her you can't deny; but don't flatter yourself that Stella——”

“I know that! I have known it longer than you think,” interrupted Filippo, who felt he could not endure to hear his friend pronounce the words which drove him to despair; and suddenly softening with compassion for himself, he said. “Advise me! You know women, and you are my friend and his. What shall I do? How ought I to deal with her now?”—

Adalbert was touched, but it was not in him to encourage lamentations over a hopeless passion, he laughed and exclaimed, “What should you do? Why, what every one does when in the same plight! Dismiss her from your thoughts, since you can't have her! You mustn't imagine that, because Stella has known you from childhood, she is not a woman as much as all the rest of them. And, above all, do not

imagine that she is, and always will be, a Saint because you have chosen to represent her as such in your pictures."

Filippo could not bear this. "What shall I do with her?" he asked again, tormented with impatience.

"What shall you do with her? Marry her to some one, and the sooner the better. Then you will be spared the task of looking after her, for she will obey her husband and do what he thinks right—I have got it," he exclaimed, interrupting himself. "I have an idea which will solve the problem; as bright and natural an idea as Columbus' egg." Stella doesn't love you; you won't let me or Milordo have her; well then give her to that tall, fine, young fellow who was in the Vigne that——"

"Marco!" interposed Filippo, firing up. "Never!"

"Mark, Peter or Paul!" exclaimed Adalbert. "It is all the same. For Stella shall have the choice of all the apostles, and the whole calendar of Saints into the bargain. We three, you, Milordo and I, will look on Stella as our common daughter. We'll fit her out, give her a dowry, and let her choose a husband after her own heart, not one of *us*, of course—and in

return for this righteous self-denial, we will only ask that she shall be nobody's model but ours. We three, and with myself at the head, will be the joint guardians of this unrivalled, much envied model, the loveliest girl in Rome! This is, I think, a delightfully novel idea, quite unprecedented in the old or new world!"

"You are very witty!" said Filippo bitterly, "but I am in no humour for joking."

"I am not joking, upon my word. I am as much in earnest, as the whole conclave of Cardinals, with their train of Monsignori and prelates, are at their daily devotions in St. Peter's!" If at first, Adalbert had made this extravagant scheme in jest, it now seemed to him really tangible, and a means of restoring his friend's peace of mind, and settling him to his work again. "Does it follow that everything that hasn't been tried, must be foolish? Stella, with a few hundred scudi and her beauty, is quite a catch. Think, what a picture might be made out of this artistic self-sacrifice! You can paint it at Roccaforte for the Prince's chapel. Stella with the man of her choice, you and the Milordo on either side as a pair of noble martyrs, while I am floating over

your heads, with outstretched arms blessing my work, and full of satisfaction at having been the author of such a happy state of things. You must decide the costumes?"

Filippo made no response. His head was bowed in his hands. Adalbert was not sure that he had heard what he had been saying, he came nearer, and laid his hand on his shoulder.

"Happiness is not for me!" Filippo murmured sadly.

"Happiness!" exclaimed Adalbert. "In what do you think happiness consists, my friend? If you only knew, my poor Santo, how perishable is that which our passions and desires call happiness in delusive moments. If you had only experienced how eagerly we can desire bliss with a blonde, after we have had it to repletion with a brunette! Which do you suppose Wilfrid would choose if it were in his power, your splendid classical talent, or this brown-haired happiness you are pining for, who would not continue your pure ideal, after she had, like Eve, tasted of the tree of good and evil, and fed your children at her breast?"

Filippo had raised his head. "My blood is more

sluggish than yours: I haven't your bright, sanguine temperament," he said sighing heavily.

Adalbert felt he was playing a winning game when he heard this confession. "You may rely on my philosophy and experience with regard to women.—Change is wholesome.—You were on a fair way to have no eyes for anyone but your Stella, as Leonardo had none except for his Mona Lisa, whose monotonously serene countenance and lips drawn into the form of a heart, quite weary one in most of his master-pieces, so that one is rejoiced at not meeting her in the 'Last Supper.' The genuine artist is in love every day, and sees in every beautiful woman the ideal as well as the woman. It is only worthy of narrow-minded Philistines to cling to one woman as your eternal ideal, to worship her through life, from the first bloom of youth to the last wrinkle and grey hair of old age."

Filippo did not answer. But Adalbert was not easily discouraged. "Hold your head up proudly, Santo!" he went on. "Look about you! Look at the Madonna della Sedia, the Madonna del Granduca, Galatea, Psyche, the old Fornarina and her countless sisters! No two of them are alike, and yet each

was at one time or another the master's ideal of the divine. And you believe the world is over for you with Stella! If she doesn't like you, you must find another. Perhaps it will be Nina, and if it isn't Nina, let it be a Grazia. Rome is big, and there are many nice bits in the Campagna! And I assure you, it is not only in cottages and tumble-down old pot-houses that God has provided something to delight the eye of the artist but in the halls and marble palaces of the great. You will find this out. Lovely eyes, free hearts and open arms will welcome you and the chance of being recorded in your pictures."

There was a ring of light-hearted gaiety in his words, which had a certain inexpressible charm for Filippo. "If I had your pure mind!" Adalbert went on, "if I could paint Madonnas and Saints as you do, princesses should lie at my feet and implore me to raise them to the lofty eminence of ideals. Do you think that Donna Carlotta, in her present burning enthusiasm for the Catholic faith, would object to be canonized, this very day by an artist's hand? Just try it, when you go out to Roccaforte."

Adalbert had gained his object. He had dis-

sipated Filippo's melancholy and brought him to his senses. His next remark showed that his work was again his first consideration. "It is absolutely necessary to introduce Stella into the Sposalizio, because the Princess has set her heart on it," he said.

"Certainly!" Adalbert replied. "Everything will be in your favour, in the charming retreat. Of course, you are at liberty to avail yourself of the opportunity, and renew your addresses, if you feel you can't help it. But if Stella is still disdainful, then she must choose whom she pleases, it mustn't be Wilfrid or myself, as I have said before; for that would be disastrous to the friendship of the three. But we will find her a trousseau, you, Milordo and I, and hold her babies at the font by turns every year."

There was something so irresistibly comic in Adalbert's expression as he said this, that Filippo was obliged to laugh. He shook Adalbert by the hand, and once more they understood each other. They looked at the clock and agreed it was no use waiting any longer for Wilfrid, and that they had better dine at once without him.

“Afterwards,” Filippo said, “I shall go and make the necessary arrangements with Stella’s grand-parents.”

He was glad at the prospect of having the girl he loved once more near him, as in Gianbattista’s lifetime, and still more glad that she would be out of Wilfrid’s reach, at least for some time to come.

CHAPTER XIII.

AFTER the Prince Salvatore and the Princess had finished their business in the studios, they drove up to the Villa Pamfili Doria. In spite of the great difference in their age, they were a well assorted pair, and lived happily together. They moved in the highest circles, for not only did the Roccafortes belong to the oldest Roman nobility, but Prince Salvatore, had by his excellent personal qualities won universal regard and esteem, and his beautiful Princess, belonging to a wealthy English family, was not less admired than himself since she had become his wife.

The Roccafortes had owned since the sixteenth century their palace on the Lungara as well as larger possessions in the Romagna, where, in course of time, they gradually expanded the village of Anciesella into quite a little town. But they inherited the title of prince from the lords of the old feudal castle of Roccaforte in the Roman hills, which had perished in flames

during the wars of an earlier period. The princes of the family, in the seventeenth century, had built instead of it the present Villa Roccaforte, which, with its gardens, terraces, woods, and parks, was a paradise of sylvan beauty. The eldest sons bore, as long as their father lived, the title of Prince of Anciesella after the little town in the Romagna.

During the last two centuries, the enormous riches of the family had been squandered by the princes themselves, whose love of display and luxury had been unbounded, and by the extravagant younger brothers and sons of the house, who frittered away their existence at the courts of the French Bourbons or in pleasure-loving Venice. Accordingly when Prince Salvatore, at the age of twenty-seven, came into the family inheritance, he found a great part of the estates heavily mortgaged. The first thing he did was, to make a noble effort to free from embarrassments and debts the vast possessions, to which he and his sister were the only heirs, and to wipe out the dishonour which his predecessors had brought on the name of Roccaforte.

He too had been wild in his early youth. People had talked about, and exaggerated his amours

and affairs of honour, but he had always been a good son and an affectionate brother. When his father died he had taken his sister to the Baths at Lucca, because she had injured her health with nursing him. Instead of a few weeks, as had been intended, they stayed some months; and then the Princess retired to her palace at Anciesella, where she remained till her death two years later.

During these two years, the Prince had not been seen in Rome, and the great ladies of the fashionable world, who sorely missed their brilliant cavalier, wondered what kept him away. They would not believe that the troublesome task of settling his affairs honourably, which he had imposed on himself, was the reason of his long absence.

It was said that, during the visit to Lucca, he had, with his sister's knowledge, a love affair which had terminated unfortunately. One evening about that time, a report had been spread, in the little inn at Anciesella that a stranger had arrived at the castle in a post chaise, and left it again in the middle of the night, accompanied by a lady, whom no one had ever seen outside the castle, but of whose presence there there had been a rumour. It had come out through

the attendant at the baths and apothecary in the little bathing place, that the Prince had been attended by a strange doctor for a severe wound, which he gave out he had inflicted on himself by accident while shooting, and that, afterwards, the Princess Agatha had lived the life of a nun, fasting and doing penance. This was a fact which no one disputed.

However, the mystery was never cleared up, for Napoleon returned from Elba, the Bourbons were again dethroned, and the terrible and mighty events of the war which burst out afresh, turned every one's sympathy from the Prince's individual concerns to the fate of the great mass of human life at stake in the awful contest. The Prince had every reason to be thankful that such was the case.

The romantic and mysterious stories that were whispered about him did not make him any the less attractive in the eyes of women. But when he had recovered from the shock of his sister's death and appeared again in Roman society, every one noticed a great change in him. He was no longer a gay young Lothario, but a thoughtful reserved man, who stayed in Rome as short a time as he possibly could, and only appeared at brilliant assemblies when he was

obliged to do so. A few years later, by his firm and determined management, he had paid off his debts and restored prosperity to his affairs once more, and then he left Rome and Italy to travel abroad.

After he had visited France and Spain, he went to England with the object of studying the English agricultural system, which was then in a more advanced stage than that of other countries. There he stayed for some time, and was delighted with the kindness and hospitality shown him by the people. He returned to his own country with favourable impressions of the English, and was determined never to lose an opportunity of showing his regard for them.

Consequently, English guests were always to be found in the Palazzo Roccaforte, and people talked about the possibility of the Prince marrying this or that daughter of the English nobility. But it was not till he was over fifty that Charlotte Fairholm visited Rome with her aunt, Wilfrid's mother, and became in the same year Princess Roccaforte.

Now, as they drove together on this lovely afternoon through the streets and up the then steep road to the Villa Pamfili on the Janiculus, the Prince was struck by the thoughtful expression of his wife's eyes

and the sweet contented smile that played round her lips, as she gazed on the fair panorama beneath them, which seemed to grow wider and wider the higher they ascended.

“My Carlotta, your love for Rome is ever a fresh source of joy and thankfulness to me,” he said. “It is a pleasure to drive up the hills with you, to see the light in your eyes as you gaze round you with such intense enjoyment.”

“Yes,” she replied, “Rome enchants me still, quite as much as it did the first time I ever saw it. I love it as well as if I had been born in it. And truly I have been born again here. All the five years I have lived here with you, I have never ceased to be grateful to you for binding me to Italy and for making a Roman of me! But still I will be frank with you, and tell you honestly that at that moment I was not thinking of Rome, or of the beauty that surrounds us. My thoughts were far away!”

“At my side, and yet not with me? That is hardly flattering, Carlotta?” said the Prince with a smile.

“I was thinking, as every bend in the road disclosed a fresh view, how exactly the same it is on our road through life, how unexpected events often cause

us to overlook what has been quite close to us, and how often what we could never have imagined possible, suddenly lies open before us—then I got lost in reminiscences of my earliest childhood.”

“How I wish I had a picture of you as you were then,” said the Prince.

“I had no mother to think of such things. You know, she died soon after I was born. My father’s business kept him in London, he only came to Stanton Court now and then on a Sunday, and really I cannot remember in the least what he was like. My first clear remembrances are going after my father’s death with old Peggy and my governess to my aunt at Harbury Hall and being introduced to Wilfrid, who was to be my playfellow; till I met you, my life was not a very happy one!”

“Thank God that I have been able to make it happy,” he said earnestly; then he added, “But it is not right to be unjust to the lot with which we were well contented before we had a better. You used often to speak affectionately of your aunt’s kindness, your happy relations to her and your cousin, till——”

“Till I found out,” Charlotte interrupted him,

“that she had Wilfrid, and her scheme of marrying me to him, more at heart than me and my happiness. Only for Wilfrid’s sake had she accustomed herself to treat me as a daughter; for his sake she advised me to look with mistrust upon all suitors, because she declared they wanted my fortune and not myself, and when she saw that your love was reciprocated, that I loved you, and would not conceal the fact, it was all over with her motherly kindness.”

The Prince knew that Charlotte still smarted under her aunt’s treatment when she took the most important step in her life. “Why indulge in these reminiscences,” he said, “if they are so unpleasant to you? But remember, Carlotta, it is faith above all things that insures our happiness. We should not allow any later experience to remove that feeling of trust and content which love for old ties gives us. If we do, we are immeasurably the poorer—”

“I cannot be so mild and forgiving as you are,” she replied.

“Perhaps it is well,” said the Prince, “this only proves you are too young to have learnt your own weakness. May you never know what it is to

wish to forget your own conduct in order to be able to forgive yourself."

"I cannot forget! I cannot forgive. At least not insults," she added half aloud. The Prince had fallen into a reverie and did not hear her and they were both silent again.

Charlotte was not wrong when she said, that her aunt's love for her had had an ulterior motive. Lady Jane had always hoped for a marriage between her niece and son. To bring this about had been the object of the Italian tour. But she knew nothing of the characters of the two young people whom she had brought up. Charlotte's quick, impulsive nature, her energy and delight in enterprize—inherited from her merchant forefathers—and Wilfrid's dreamy idealism were not likely to mingle in anything more than friendship. When they met again in Rome after a separation of a year and a half, Charlotte at five and twenty seemed no longer young in Wilfrid's eyes, who was only two years her junior. Her early independence and vast fortune had given her an air of self-reliance quite incompatible with a clinging girlishness, and altogether his admiration for her was slight; while she too had long ago formed quite a different picture

of the man she would desire for her husband. There was not the same friendly understanding between them which there had been before. But Charlotte was enchanted with the Roman life, and strongly attracted by the poetical sensuousness of the Catholic services; and it was only when she declared she must live in Rome, that she and Wilfrid felt drawn to each other by the similarity of their wishes and sentiments in this respect; though it was with no idea of fulfilling Lady Jane's ardent desire. Their friendship was re-established, but the idea of marriage was as far from their thoughts as ever.

About this time Charlotte made the Prince's acquaintance, was flattered by his attentions to her, and much impressed by his noble presence and thoughtful mien. Like most of her countrywomen she was anxious for social distinction, and her High-Church orthodoxy made it easy for her to join another orthodox church, whose ritual charmed her fancy, and whose creed was placed attractively before her; while a warm affection was springing up in her heart for the man far above her socially, and thirty years older than herself.

A tremendous battle between Lady Jane and her

niece, and then a complete rupture, were the consequences of her resolution, and Wilfrid's attempts at mediation were of no avail; it was a source of satisfaction to Charlotte that, in spite of the breach, Wilfrid continued his friendly relations to her, for she knew that his mother wished him to have no further intercourse with her, and had tried her utmost to prevail upon him to give up associating with her and the Prince. Thus, with her ever increasing love for the Prince, and her growing dependence on the teaching of the Catholic Church, her strong dislike to her aunt was one of her ruling passions.

Neither husband nor wife spoke for some minutes. The sight of a pretty peasant girl sitting by the roadside with an older woman, reminded the Prince of Stella; he told the Princess how much her beauty had astonished him. "For once," he said, "I was struck with the inability of art to portray real beauty. But am I not right? We have heard of this girl somewhere before."

"Of course," Charlotte replied. "The priest, when he proposed Filippo as the painter for our chapel, mentioned this pretty child. He told us she was his adopted sister and unrivalled model."

"And isn't she the daughter of the old church

apparatore, who came to such an unfortunate end," asked the Prince, "and who employed Marco?"

"Yes! The priest has so often praised the dead man and Filippo to me, and spoken in such high terms of the orphan girl's goodness and practical qualities, that I consider it my duty to interest myself in poor Stella. The original little passage in the studio this morning clearly proved that she is pure and innocent as the day. But she would be soon lost if she were left to the tender mercies of those three men, the one who loves her, the other who has unholy designs on her, and the third to whom she offers herself and her innocent young love. And a creature whom God has gifted with so much perfect beauty, the being who is to represent the ideal of virgin purity in our chapel for the worship of generations, should not in all humanity be allowed to fall into shame and sin. This thought occurred to me this morning as I looked at her beautiful young face, my heart went out to her, and I determined to save her from disgrace. God would surely not have made the child so marvellously lovely, if He had not—"

She stopped suddenly, as if she were shy of finishing her sentence. The Prince shrugged his shoulders.

“You know the poet’s words, Carlotta,” he said, “about the ‘fatal gift of beauty.’ Too long and too often has the phrase been applicable to our country: no less does it apply to the daughters of the people. What would be a blessing from heaven itself for a Princess, may prove a curse to this fair child, and is so perhaps already—”

“Then you do not think much of my scheme?”

“Yes! you know I love your warm-hearted generosity; Filippo will certainly work better with the girl near him, otherwise his jealousy and love might take him to Rome oftener than would be convenient. But ask yourself what you intend to do with the girl? For when you have once taken her from her present mode of life into our household, you will always be more or less responsible for her. You do not know her character and disposition. You cannot possibly foresee how she will behave under our roof, and how she will get on with our people. Is she to wait on you? Is she to marry Filippo? Or what will you do with her?”

“Stop! stop!” cried some one from a carriage which at the same moment drew up alongside of the Prince’s

equipage. Charlotte hailed the interruption with delight.

The respective footmen jumped down from their boxes and opened the carriage doors. Count Altamonte and his wife, who had just returned to the town from their country residence, alighted to greet the Princess. They had not seen each other for months, and to make the most of this chance meeting, the Count and Countess got into the Prince's landau while their own phaeton followed them. They did not descend into the town till they had driven several times round the villa, and the sun had begun to set when they parted. No one had rejoiced more than Charlotte at the accidental meeting, because it had put an end to any further discussion between herself and the Prince.

CHAPTER XIV.

WHEN the carriage reached the Palace the lights were burning in the massive and handsomely wrought lamps beneath the gateway, and round the magnificent fountain in the centre of the inner court-yard, on which the four wings of the palace opened. The gradually rising grand staircase, the walls of which were decorated with antique sculpture, was also illuminated, and servants in costly livery hurried with torches to greet their master and mistress and escort them up the stairs through the long galleries and ante-rooms to their own apartments.

The Prince asked if anyone had called in his absence and what letters had come for him. His valet brought him a few cards and letters on an antique silver salver, and informed him that the priest had arrived at the palace, and was awaiting the Princess.

Daily at this hour Don Matteo was accustomed to call upon the Princess, for although it was many

years now since he had become priest of Santa Maria Traspontina, the Prince still looked upon him as belonging to his household, remembering that he had been his father's chaplain, and had stood by the deathbeds of the late Prince and the Princess Agatha. He possessed the Prince's entire confidence, had brought about the Princess's conversion, and the Prince was glad that Charlotte had chosen him for her father confessor and spiritual adviser.

Both the Prince and the priest, in spite of their esteem for Charlotte's irreproachable character, had not blinded themselves to the fact that, considering the state of society around them, the marriage of a beautiful young woman of five-and-twenty, whose great fortune had made her independent long ago, with a man much older than herself, might possibly bring with it certain risks. There was still more food for reflection for Don Matteo as time went on and the princely pair remained childless, and when he became familiar with the peculiarities of Charlotte's nature, and learned to know her even better than the Prince knew her himself.

Charlotte possessed a powerful imagination, mostly directed to practical matters, with which was closely

allied a capacity for originating plans and carrying them out with unwearying energy. She liked to have something always in hand that promised results either for herself or others. She amused herself with removing obstacles that stood in her way; and if doing good was to her a game, it was a game of a very earnest character! This being the case, the priest had done well in introducing the young Princess, at the very out-set, into a circle of good and benevolent women belonging to the old Roman nobility, who were known and beloved by the people, and foremost in all good works.

The Prince had highly approved this step, and Charlotte herself had understood how important it was for her to gain a recognised social footing in her new life. She was philanthropic to her heart's core, and ready to give her assistance whenever an opportunity offered. She found in the teaching of the Church a never failing source of comfort, and encouragement in the works of charity to which she had devoted herself; and she deemed herself fortunate in finding, in the old adherent and friend of the house of Roccaforte, a man whose knowledge of the people and their concerns made him invaluable, and

as an adviser and director in her philanthropic schemes.

It was the priest who had inspired the Princess, (although she did not know it,) with the idea of building a chapel as a lasting memorial of her union with the house of Roccaforte. It was he who had suggested her taking Sister Monica, a teacher in one of the convent schools, out to Roccaforte, to instruct the children of the neighbourhood in reading and sewing, and it was not from lack of zeal on his part that old Peggy clung obstinately to the faith in which she had been brought up, and refused to join the Church of Rome, as her mistress desired.

The Princess and her father confessor always had a great deal to discuss and decide, and it was only natural that she should devote herself first to the people of the parish in which she lived, the sphere of the priest's activity, and take an interest in his personal affairs, listening graciously whenever he thought he might rightly speak to her of Marco and use his credit in his nephew's behalf.

CHAPTER XV.

THE Princess kept the priest waiting longer than usual to-day. For more than half an hour he had sat in the room where she received her intimate acquaintances. He had known the room for years, and it looked very much the same as it had the first-day he saw it. For the Princess had shown her wisdom in leaving the house as unchanged as possible. Only where it was absolutely necessary had she replaced old things with new, and she and her own possessions fitted in admirably with the old picturesque surroundings, so that everywhere there was a pleasant and effective blending of ancient splendour with modern luxury.

The argand lamps, (which at that time had just come into general use,) were burning on the antique brackets and a bright wood fire crackling on the hearth threw out the necessary warmth into the lofty

room. The heavy blue damask hangings, the magnificent ceiling, the family portraits painted by a master's hand, were all familiar objects to the priest. He was never tired of looking at the youthful Cardinal Giovanni Roccaforte, Prince Salvatore's great-great-uncle; and the beautiful Princess Vittoria of the family of Caraffa, painted by Bronzino, was always a fresh delight to him. The aged Prince Manfredo Roccaforte had married her after his first wife died, stricken in years and childless. The race had been near extinction then, as now; but Prince Manfredo had lived to see his numerous offspring by the beautiful Vittoria grow up round him. Prince Salvatore was considerably younger than his ancestor had been then, and he and the Princess were both in excellent health, but the heir to the house of Roccaforte had not yet made his appearance.

"It is a grievous pity to think of such a name and such a race dying out!" the priest said to himself half aloud, as the folding doors opened and the Princess came in with a light, quick step.

"I am unpunctual to-day, Don Matteo," she exclaimed, looking at the great rococo clock, which stood on a massive stand between two landscapes by Salvator

Rosa. "But it is not my fault that I have kept you waiting. It is nearly six o'clock, but before we go to dinner, (for I hope you will not refuse to dine with us this evening,) I must tell you as much as I can of the events of to-day."

As she spoke she dropped into her special chair by the fireside opposite the priest. "To begin with," she went on, "the Countess of Altamonte is back again in Rome, and has promised me an annual donation of 60 scudi for our society for starting virtuous young girls in life."

The priest praised the Countess's generosity, and thanked the Princess for her active sympathy in the good work. Charlotte passed quickly on to another subject.

"Now," she said smiling, "I have something to tell you which will surprise you. We went to-day with my cousin Wilfrid to Filippo Mai's studio! and afterwards visited a German landscape painter, a friend of his, and whom do you think we met in this German's studio? No less a person than your lovely penitent, Filippo's model, whom you told us about when her father was killed, the poor Apparatore who was teaching Marco his trade."

The priest looked at her with an expression of unbounded astonishment. "Stella in a German painter's studio?" he asked.

"Oh!" exclaimed the Princess, "You only express surprise, but Filippo was simply wild when he found her there. He scolded the poor girl so severely, that she burst into tears. It was quite a little comedy I can assure you, and I felt so sorry for the child that I could not forbear meddling in the matter.

"How?" inquired the priest.

"I am going to send Stella under sister Monica's wing out to Roccaforte. I hope you have no objection?"

The priest could scarcely believe his ears. But he was accustomed to the humours and impulsive actions of women of position in the fashionable world. He knew Charlotte was not altogether free from fanciful notions, although generally she did not judge by appearances and outward impressions only, but thought out and investigated matters before she took any active part in them. He could not conceive what had induced her to decide so suddenly and with such determination to provide for the girl, whose virtue and

excellent qualities he had always made a point of praising; and as he was anxious not to express an opinion till he was clear on the subject, he put a question in the place of an answer by inquiring whether Stella's relatives approved of the scheme.

"I have commissioned Filippo to arrange all that," she said, tossing back some stray tresses of her fair hair, which waved all over her well shaped, stately, little head. "When I proposed it, I forgot that you had mentioned grandparents. I thought for the moment that she must live alone, with that other model who was with her in the studio, I mean Chiaruccia; one is quite tired of seeing that girl's head in pictures now. It was Filippo who reminded me of the relations!"

"Her grandmother is obstinate and becoming helpless with old age," suggested the priest. "I doubt whether she will be prevailed upon to spare Stella!"

They were both silent for a minute, watching each other like two friends on either side of the chessboard, each with his plan in his head, and anxious to discover the other's intentions. The priest however was the calmer of the two, when he discovered that the Princess had not expected any objections or advice on his part

but had counted on his immediate approval and consent to the scheme.

Meanwhile he held council with himself, and concluded that his own object and intentions with regard to Stella would in no wise be thwarted by the Princess thus taking a fancy to her, of her own free will, and not by his instigation. Then, as the Prince had pointed out to his wife, the priest saw that Charlotte would be to a certain extent answerable for Stella's future if she took her up now, and Don Matteo promised himself that this would sooner or later turn out advantageously to Marco. But, at the same time, he was aware that what succeeds too easily may get too easily wearied of, and that it is as well to be cautious in accepting favours, till there is some security that they will be lasting. He therefore purposely kept the Princess in uncertainty.

"I will speak to the old people to-morrow," he said. "It will be necessary to find a substitute for Stella. Perhaps an honest girl may turn up to fill her place. Otherwise, I do not presume, your Highness, to make objections to your plan. Our good impulses come from that higher Power which leaves it to our own discretion to follow them or to leave them un-

heeded. It may be a source of blessing that you met this young girl and that she won your sympathy, that another opportunity has offered itself of doing a good work, and doubtless you are thus inspired and directed from above."

The priest little guessed how he had come to Charlotte's help by attributing these motives to her. She caught at the idea of God directing her heart in this case, and, speaking more calmly than she had hitherto done, she said in a tone of acquiescence, "You know how that kind of thing affects one. The girl seemed to me so friendless and unprotected. I thought it would be doing Filippo a service, who is a good young man, and for whom the Prince has an especial liking and—" she stopped, then added, "Originally I only intended to let Stella stay with Peggy and sister Monica in Roccaforte as long as Filippo wanted her as his model and for our picture. But you are right. The Lord threw Stella in my path and urged me to stretch out a helping hand to her, and that determines me to be her guardian and benefactor for the future. I shall count on you, Don Matteo, to win the grandparents' consent, in case Filippo does not succeed."

The priest bowed assent. At this moment a servant announced Wilfrid, and as she gave orders for him to be shown in, she raised her beautiful eyes to the picture of the Virgin, and said, turning to her father confessor, "You do not know how glad I am that you approve of my plan. Who can tell to what extent God in His infinite wisdom uses us for His purposes, and what He intends to do for others, through us, when our hearts are moved in this way with such deep sympathy and interest in a fellow creature."

Don Matteo was puzzled at this remark of the Princess's. One thing was clear, she had more in her mind than she chose to disclose to him; she had some hidden intention, the result of which seemed dubious even to herself, and in which under any circumstances she wished to make sure of his assistance and co-operation.

CHAPTER XVI.

A few other friends of the family besides the priest and Wilfrid joined the Princess and Prince at the tastefully decorated dinner table. They were used to meeting each other constantly here, so all the party were intimately acquainted. This evening Wilfrid struck every one as unusually absent and preoccupied.

He had endeavoured to forget the accidental meeting with Stella, but had not succeeded. She filled his imagination, and from the first moment he had seen her, it was something more than the artist's longing for a pretty model that had so constantly engaged his thoughts. More than once, under the flimsiest pretexts, he had gone in the direction of the Piazza Rusticucci, and turned into St. Peter's, irritated and disappointed at not meeting the object of his pilgrimage. But now he could not deceive himself about his passion for Stella, since she had shown her love for him in such an undisguised way in the presence

of others. The light of her pure eyes had flooded and warmed his soul like sunshine; do what he would, he could think of nothing else but her, and the happiness of possessing her innocent love.

Like a boy in love for the first time, this worldly man of eight-and-twenty sat in a state of excited expectancy, wondering whether Charlotte would refer to her visit to the studios, and bring Stella into the conversation; and at the same moment in which he half hoped she would do so, he shrank from the idea of a jest being made of her love, or anything being said that might jar or wound him. However, he need not have been afraid. There were other things to talk about, and the conversation did not flag.

The season was at its height, Rome was full of strangers, and as at every entertainment foreigners were elbowing natives in a vast crowd, of course many amusing occurrences and anecdotes were related round the table. Individuals and their concerns, rumoured engagements and forthcoming marriages were freely discussed, varied by political reflections. The Pope's malady, which had been pronounced incurable, naturally gave rise to the question which of the Cardinals was to succeed him; the Prince

and the other Roman noblemen at his table expressed a hope that Mauro Cappellari, who had risen from the ranks of the people, would be succeeded by a member of the old nobility; while the priest with modest firmness pointed to the origin of the Episcopate and Papacy, to prove that a man of the people, at the head of the Church, has ever been the best exponent of the true Christian principle of universal equality before God. This did not prevent him from denouncing with passionate vehemence the attacks on the Pope's temporal power, which had become notorious in the rebellions of the last few years, and which still smouldered on in the minds of those whose families had been in any way connected with those unhappy events.

Some praised, others blamed, the severity with which the government had dealt with the rebels. The old Count Ghirardo observed that stern and speedy justice had been in these emergencies the only remedy, and, like an operation in a case of disease, had decided between life and death. The Prince, with his usual moderation, maintained that justice should never change her character even in the most extreme cases, and assume the character of revènge. Naturally the priest heartily agreed with this sentiment; but Charlotte said,

"From my childhood I have never been able to understand why vengeance should be considered so terrible, even you, Don Matteo, have not convinced me upon the subject."

"Carlotta!" exclaimed the Prince, "you are not in earnest!"

"You don't suppose I do not blame myself," she answered, "I have fought against the sentiment. But it is no good, I cannot help it. It may be the cold and narrow creed I was brought up in; or perhaps I am devoid of that sense of right and wrong which I ought certainly to possess, considering my education, but I cannot see why, if we are never to forget the good that has been done us, and are to show ourselves eternally grateful for it, we should not remember the wrong and do all in our power to make those suffer who have made us suffer—especially if in the end the punishment turns out to be for their good."

She added this with a little laugh, as if she wished what she had said not to be taken seriously, for the astonishment of her guests and the disapprobation of the priest and the Prince did not escape her. The latter came to her rescue, and with ready tact helped her out of the embarrassing position in which the silence of

the others placed her. In fact neither the Prince, nor the priest, nor yet Wilfrid, could mistake what had been working in Charlotte's mind at that moment.

The little hitch in the conversation was soon apparently forgotten. But the harmonious and easy flow of talk did not set in again, and the Princess soon rose. The priest took his leave, and the Prince and his friends, after a short chat over their wine, sat down to the card-tables. Charlotte and Wilfrid stepped out on the loggia, on which the salons opened on the garden side of the palace, and from whence through the wide and lofty arches the eye rested on a fair view.

It was a starless night, but mild and balmy. The stillness was broken only by the soft regular splash of the fountains, which, in Rome, are as familiar as the sounds of Nature. Charlotte sat down in one of the comfortable chairs in a corner of the loggia, and Wilfrid took a seat near her, on the stone balustrade. For a long while they said nothing; it was impossible to forget what had just passed.

"I called early this morning on Monsignore Baldasaro," remarked the Princess at last, "to prevail upon him to manage an audience with the Holy

Father for Lady Glanville and her daughters. But he thinks it most improbable that the Pope will grant it in his present condition."

Wilfrid made no response, although he was acquainted with the Catholic family whom the Princess mentioned. After a considerable pause he told her, that two old friends of his had arrived in Rome a day or two ago, who wanted him to accompany them the next day on a trip into the Campagna. They thought of going to Ostia for a few days.

The stiffness between them had not worn off. The Princess felt that silence made the matter worse, and was determined to make another effort to talk and dispel Wilfrid's moodiness. "If you get as far as Roccaforte, and find it convenient to pass a night there, don't let our absence prevent you from doing so. The Steward is attentive, Peggy will be charmed to make you real English tea, and probably you will find our painter established there. But," she exclaimed suddenly, before Wilfrid had time to thank her, "what happy people you artists are! What a charmingly natural life you lead here! You were right when you said, that living in Italy has a wholesome effect on Englishmen, because they are bound to put aside their conventionalities

and prejudices in their intercourse with a people so gifted with grace and beauty. Nobleness seems to be actually born *with* and *in* them."

Wilfrid brightened directly. "You are thinking of Stella!" he said, and was glad that Charlotte could not see his face distinctly at that moment.

"Of course!" she replied. "The Prince, who is accustomed to the beauty of his countrywomen, says, that, since the celebrated Vittoria's time, he has seen nothing to equal this girl's perfect loveliness. How fascinating she was, brimming over with her affection! When this divine creature selected you out of the three admirers ranged before her, it was a counter picture to Venus receiving the apple from Paris. It must have vanquished you entirely." She said this in a tone that he might take either for jest or earnest.

But he was inclined to be quite serious. Forgetting for the first time his displeasure at Charlotte's unfortunate remark at dinner, he said eagerly and earnestly, "The first time I met her, the first moment I set eyes on her, I was vanquished. But it amazes me that there is anything in me to attract her. I can only ask myself, how I have won her love?"

"And it is a question you like asking yourself," she

replied, "for your good looks and amiability give you a very satisfactory answer."

"Well," said he, "you know me, Charlotte. I have not the smooth tongue of a Monsignore or an Abbate. The Yorkshire soil and climate cling to me still. What people here would no doubt heedlessly enjoy and then destroy—" He stopped, then said: "If you had seen her as I did, in the midst of her joyous merriment at one of the October fêtes, and then at her father's grave, so dignified and gentle in her sorrow, coming to me and—" he broke off again.

Charlotte's eyes glistened. She now had reason to be glad of the dim light. It would not have done for Wilfrid to see how pleased she looked. It was more than she had expected or hoped, but there was no suspicion of this satisfaction in the quiet tone in which she put the question. "Do you really love this girl?"

"Do I love her?" said he. "A bird that flies into our room without our invitation, the small dog that devotes himself to us without our noticing it at first, grow into our hearts," he said; "how can I then help loving the purest of women, who offers me a higher and holier love than the world we live in knows or dreams of!—"

Do I love her?—Since the first time I saw her, the fire of passion has burned within me!”

He became more and more agitated as he spoke. He got up from his place and came and stood close to Charlotte.

“They talk of cross roads,” he said half to himself, “where you are to choose between vice and virtue, as as if the two did not resemble each other sometimes so closely, that you have to ask yourself which is virtue in this case, and which the opposite? What are the torments of Tantalus in comparison with mine!” he laughed bitterly. “Hunger and thirst, and the streams gurgling at his feet, and the golden fruit hanging over his head, so that he can’t reach it!—Not pleasant certainly!—But to be devoured with a burning, mad longing, for a creature whose beauty and innocence rivals that of Eve as she stood for the first time on the newly created earth, to know that this being loves you, and longs for you, as much as you for her, that her arms are open, outstretched to receive you!”

He checked this wild outburst, ran his fingers through his thick wavy hair, and said, collecting himself: “Let us say no more. Forgive me! what I have

said, you ought never to have heard, I was besides myself, or I could never have spoken with so little restraint. Pardon me!"

She held out her hand. "On the contrary," she said, in a tone which reassured him, "to whom should you open your heart, if it is not to me? I love you as a sister, and remember, we are not at Harbury Hall, and I am not Miss Fairholm now. We are in Rome, where we may be natural and act like creatures with hearts. Carlotta Roccaforte knows what it is to be suddenly overtaken by love, and to find thoughts, feelings, faith, all recast under its magic power. I know what love is, and what the agonies and the joys of love mean. Speak openly to me, I will listen with a sympathetic ear and reverent heart. What passed between you three and the girl yesterday was unmistakable. I thought of you when I proposed to remove Stella from your neighbourhood, at least for the present."

Wilfrid pressed the hand which was still lying in his. "It was good of you," he said, "but what do you intend to do afterwards?"

"Tell me first what you are going to do?" she asked.

"I—I will finish the good work you begin by taking myself off." He had not thought of his departure till this instant, and directly he had spoken, he regretted his words, for they might bind him in future.

"You will leave Rome?"

Her incredulous tone made a loophole of escape. "I suppose I must," he said, then added hesitatingly, "as soon as I have finished my picture."

This was just what Charlotte wished. Quickly divining his thoughts, she said: "It would be doing yourself a positive wrong not to finish your picture where you have begun it. Your first historical effort, the scene from 'Romeo and Juliet,' will sure to be successful if it is carried out in this historical atmosphere. Who is your model for Juliet?"

Wilfrid considered a moment whether he should tell her, but he felt that unburdening his mind had done him good so far and continued: "It was Stella, and her suddenly awakened love for me, which put the idea into my head, and I hoped I might be able to get her to sit to me as a model. But now she is your protégée, that is all over—and it is better that it is over."

"Better?" repeated the Princess with emphasis,

“Who can say beforehand what will be best for us in the future? Who can possibly conjecture what great changes the smallest events bring in our lives? How little your mother knew what consolation and happiness she was preparing for me when she made up her mind to a journey to the sunny south, with quite another object in view for you, and for me? God may have been preparing for you too, happiness and consolation when He gave me my husband and his love, and prevented your mother from talking us into an union which must have ended unhappily for both of us? Certainly it has cost me your mother’s affection, who has spurned me from her, as if every human being was not at liberty to seek the cure for his soul that his conscience acknowledges as the right one, and as if I had not always been loving and grateful to her as a daughter! May she never repent it! I have begun a new life in every way. I am happy, and at peace with myself. And you, dearest Wilfrid, are free.”

He scarcely heard what she said, he was so engaged with his own thoughts. She was not unconscious of this. “Ah,” she exclaimed, wishing to arrest his attention, “I know what this inward

struggle is! I have lived through the battle in which we so often mistrust ourselves, because our preconceived notions will not let us at first listen to the dictates of our hearts. But the heart is the true guide, philosopher, and friend of us all; if it keeps us in doubt and darkness, it removes the veil from our eyes at last, and shows us the joyful prospect Heaven has been preparing for us. Listen to your heart! Follow the road along which it directs you!"

Her words sounded solemn and impressive, but she was in the gayest spirits. She had again had the satisfaction of holding up to the son his mother's injustice, and the still greater satisfaction of contemplating the possibility of realizing what had dawned on her that morning, and now engrossed and animated her.

As she saw Wilfrid was not inclined for any further discussion, she proposed they should go indoors. She put her hand in his arm, and, as they walked to the house, said: "To-morrow you will set to work again on Juliet?"

"No! I told you, I think, that to-morrow I start for Ostia in the Campagna."

"How forgetful! Sympathy in your love," (she used

the expression intentionally), "makes me unmindful of your other concerns. But I am glad you are going. The Campagna and sea air will do you good, and when you return to Rome you will have recovered your equilibrium, and we will talk more about it. You shall not leave Rome altogether; I shall stand out against that, for I think I may be allowed to exercise a little selfishness with regard to my oldest and dearest friend."

She pressed his hand, and he kissed hers, and they entered the room where the whist players still sat at the card table. Wilfrid took leave of the Prince, and parted from Charlotte with many assurances of confidence and friendship. The next day he started with his countrymen for Ostia in the Campagna.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE excursion was originally to have lasted three days. Wilfrid was the cause of its being prolonged, for the little change had not the soothing effect, which he had expected, on his disturbed frame of mind. He was more excited and uneasy than he had been before.

The conversation with the Princess, which had led him to the first spoken confession of his love, had brought him to look at the whole matter from a different point of view. His longing for Stella had been stronger and more passionate than words can express, but as, till now, the thought of marrying her had never entered his head, he had not dared trust himself to seek her society, because it was not only Stella's beauty but her innocence which exercised such a charm over him. Now, Charlotte's significant remarks had suggested possibilities that had never occurred to

him before. As they crowded into his mind they oppressed and confused him, but he was powerless to shake them off.

His travelling companions, fresh from England, conversed about English society and politics, but failed to win his interest. All the time they were talking, Charlotte's words would ring in his ears: "How can we know what happiness Providence has in store for us, or how deeply the most trifling events may affect us afterwards." There could be no doubt what she had meant when she said that.

He was not intolerant like his mother, nor religious in her or the Princess's sense of the word. Yet he could not abandon himself to agnosticism, and give up his faith in a future life. There was a conflict between his reasoning and emotional faculties. The symbolic worship of Catholicism appealed to his fancy. The splendour and beauty of the churches delighted his eye, and the formulas of the service attracted him. It would not have troubled him in the slightest degree if the woman he married belonged to the Roman Church; but, on the other hand, he knew how

impossible it would be for Stella to marry a Protestant, how a Catholic daughter-in-law would never be acceptable to his mother, irrespective of the difficulties that would beset the child of the people, the unsophisticated Italian maiden, in the conventional circles of English county society. But neither this consideration nor his sense of honour altered the state of his feelings; at one moment he determined to turn his back on Rome, in the next his love, united with his ambition as an artist, rose before him. Then he told himself that the formation of his future must depend on the success or failure of his historical picture. If his power proved equal to it, he would become an artist altogether and reside in Italy for the rest of his life; but if his talent showed itself insufficient for such a career, he would go back to England, live on his estates, or make his debut in politics, and regard art, not as his profession but as a friendly companion in life, only to be enjoyed in recreation hours.

He was in a no better condition when he returned to the city, than he had been on the morning he left it with his English friends. He went immediately to

his studio, and had not been there long before he sought Adalbert's society.

"You have been away a long time," was his friend's greeting. "The Santo departed on his mission the same day as you left."

"I thought so," said Wilfrid. "I intended looking him up, that afternoon, but couldn't possibly find the time."

"You needn't repent it," laughed Adalbert. "I don't think he was particularly anxious to meet you after Stella's latest piece of charming candour. Poor fellow, I pitied him, he was quite upset. It was all I could do to send him away in a tolerably good temper. I had to resort to a trick at last. Look here."

He selected as he spoke from a heap of sketches and daubs a moderately sized canvas and placed it on the easel. It was one of those caricatures on which the artist delights to expend his wit, and in which, the Rhinelander used from his childhood to carnival pranks, constantly found an outlet for his inexhaustible fund of humour, as well as his masterly talent.

The picture he had drawn in words the other morning to distract Filippo, had been transferred to

the canvas with a few bold strokes; it was sketched in colour, for he never used a pencil; and the figures represented, were unmistakeable in spite of great exaggeration.

He himself, the Prussian eagle in his rear, floated as Providence in the clouds, raining down a shower of gold on Stella, who was standing erect, while one of her kneeling attendants held a money box aloft, to catch the coins as they fell. To the right of Stella was Wilfrid supported by the English unicorn, with a newly christened baby in his arms; and to the left Filippo with the Roman wolf cowering at his feet, holding a boy by one hand and a girl by the other, who carried his palette, brushes and maulstick.

It was almost impossible to look at the caricature without laughing. Wilfrid smiled against his will. "What is the point of this cartoon, may I ask?" he said.

"You speak of it so contemptuously," replied Adalbert, "because you do not know the noble sentiments that prompted me to paint it, and can't appreciate the deep mystery which it is intended to convey. Look at the St. Francis-like expression on Filippo's counten-

ance! even in jest one can't ignore the grave nobility of his features; look with what awe he gazes up at me, who in my omnipotent mercy and wisdom have extricated us and our triple friendship from the maze into which we were betrayed by Stella's angelic and at the same time Syren-like beauty." And then Adalbert told Wilfrid the proposal he had made Filippo, and how sure he was that it would be for the good and peace of them all to carry out this whimsical plan.

"If we give Stella a handsome dowry she won't be long in deciding on a husband," he said, "and the sooner we do it the better. Directly she is safely married, Filippo's equilibrium will be restored, he will say it is God's will, and you know how firm and unchanging his faith is, how he believes God does everything for the best. *We* shall be the richer, for we shall share between us this treasure of a model in all her glorious freshness. Stella likes the business and has a remarkable talent for posing; and I should like to meet with the Roman who would make objections to his wife enabling him to lounge at his leisure on the Corso or the Forum, according to the

genuine Roman custom, while at the same time she brings him in daily so many scudi, with her work, and so keeps the pot boiling.”

A dark, angry flush suffused Milordo's countenance, and the veins stood out on his forehead. “Shall the unfortunate girl be consigned to such a wretched fate, to such absolute misery for our sakes? No, never! never, as long as I can prevent it!” he burst out with passionate emphasis.

“Misery? What do you call misery, my dear fellow? We are in Rome, in the land of human nature, as Winkelmann calls it, in the land of easy goingness,” jested Adalbert. “And you will scarcely find one amongst the thousands of inhabitants of the eternal city who does not in his heart agree with their old proverb, ‘If one could earn money without working, the world would be a paradise.’ Do we not know women of all ranks in this country, who owe, to husbands perfectly willing to acquiesce cheerily in their dishonour, that right of managing their own affairs as they like, which in Stella's case would be a foregone conclusion?”

“Wonderful saints you are, both of you.” Nilo continued taking no notice of Wilfrid's offended air.

“But Santo, unlike you, doesn’t enjoy the happiness of being to his goddess’s taste. It really is absurd to elevate this little girl of the people to the skies, and canonize and make a martyr of her against her will. Is Stella never to confess anything but imaginary sins? That kind of thing can’t last for ever. So let us be sensible and set her up in the world, so that she may enjoy it and its pleasures, and not let her be buried in a convent, as I have no doubt the Princess intends to do with her in the end. Just give Stella the choice, and you will see that she will jump at my offer, in spite of Santo’s love and your self-denial. I have no patience with either of you.”

“I would rather not discuss the matter further. All I beg is, that you will leave me out of your Quixotic scheme,” said Wilfrid, irritably walking to the door.

“Shall we meet at lunch?” Adalbert called after him.

“No, I think not. I shall be engaged to-day and to-morrow too!” was Wilfrid’s answer, as he shut the door behind him.

Adalbert shook his head. “How noble—and how foolish! Poor things! But it is getting past a joke.

More's the pity!" he muttered to himself, mixing his colours, and then he painted away steadily and industriously till midday.

But for Wilfrid all idea of peace was now at an end.

CHAPTER XVIII.

FILIPPO and the priest had found it easier than they had thought to prevail upon Stella's grandparents to spare her, but Sister Monica had been detained by the Mother Superior at her convent longer than she had expected, and Filippo had been in the villa more than ten days before the vetturino brought Sister Monica and Stella to Roccaforte.

It was a clear, fresh day. The sun was still high in the heavens, though the wind had begun gently to stir the foliage of the oaks, and to fill the air with the fragrant scent of the blossoming orange trees and Japanese medlars on the terrace, when a heavily laden vehicle laboured up the winding carriage road, and stood still at the entrance to the villa.

The Steward, whose forefathers had served the family ever since the present castle had been built, his daughters, and old Mistress Margaret, who had once been the Princess's nurse, all came out to

receive the expected arrivals. It was only natural that Filippo should find himself among them, and the doors of the ungainly old-fashioned carriage had hardly been opened, before Stella sprang out, threw her arms round his neck, and kissed him, over and over again, exclaiming in joyous tones, "Ah, my Lippo, my dear good Lippo, how beautiful the world is! How glad I am to be out of the old, ugly place and far away from the cross old grandparents. It is lovely here. Oh! I will stay here, for ever if I may! I am so glad to see you again, my Lippo."

The Steward was amazed, and old Peggy, who had been led to expect a quiet decorous young damsel, was struck dumb with astonishment. Even Filippo felt that her conduct must appear strange and unseemly; but Sister Monica's amused smile and gentle excuses for her charge soon set everything right.

"Don't damp her spirits; she is a good child," she said kindly, "this gentleman was her parents' adopted son. They are like brother and sister, and she is so delighted with God's fair earth. She is like the young lambs when they first begin to leap about. God makes their hearts feel as hers does now. She is wild

because she is so young." Then, turning to Stella, she added, "you must behave sensibly, my daughter, and look about you afterwards. Your first duty is to wish the Signore Castellano good day, and to kiss the Signora Margaret's hand, to whom her Highness the Princess has been good enough to send you."

Stella, in the midst of her glee, was concerned at having begun with such a blunder. She humbly did as she was bid, and her pure, sweet beauty, and frank natural manner, won all hearts directly. An hour later she sat with Peggy and the Steward's family at supper, talking gaily, but not too much, and answering questions in a pleasantly straight-forward manner. She was astonished that Filippo did not join the party at table. But the Princess, not careless of her philanthropic and further intentions with regard to Stella, had given very express orders about these matters.

She had arranged that Stella should live with Peggy, but go every day during lesson hours to Sister Monica, who was comfortably lodged near her school in a little house on the outskirts of the park. Peggy was to instruct Stella in English usages, and when it was possible, teach her to speak a little English,

and Sister Monica would undertake the rest of her education so far as she was able.

“I want her to become a useful little handmaiden, for you and me,” the Princess had written to the old servant; but at the same time she had given strict orders that Stella was to change nothing in her costume, and was in no way to be hindered in her religious observances. It was an understood thing that Stella and Signor Mai should see each other when the latter considered it necessary and wanted Stella to sit as his model, for his wishes were to be consulted and his orders obeyed on every occasion.

The Prince's domestics, accustomed to the strictest and most exact obedience, fulfilled these instructions to the letter. And Stella and Filippo, without having a word to say in the matter, found that, through these orders of the Princess's, their relations to each other were entirely altered. Filippo was the honoured guest of the house, Stella was the servant's visitor, and although he was glad to have her near him and out of Adalbert's and Wilfrid's reach, and the seductive Chiaruccia's way, it pleased him most to think that he, whom she had rejected was ranked so far above her. He told himself that it was small and mean on his part, but

he could not help a feeling of satisfaction when the butler announced his meals with a respectful bow, while Stella dined with the Steward's family, and was not waited upon as he was. She was still his artistic ideal. Her acquiescence in his wishes would still have made him happy, but he wished her to feel that a marriage with him would have placed her in a higher, not a lower position. Since he had lived away from Stella his wounded pride had awakened his egoism and cooled his passion.

A decided change had come over him since he had left Rome and spent his time alone at Roccaforte. Such a life, such contentment, and such inward harmony as he knew here, he had never experienced before. It was true that he had never desired or needed anything when he had occupied the humble little room in Gianbattista's house. Nevertheless, he had thought more of himself when he lived near his studio in the Via Margutta, and could call a tiny square of ground on the slope of the Pincio with a few trees and shrubs his own. When he had spent his summers with his friends at the inns in the Alban and Sabine mountains, he had enjoyed nature to the full, and passed delightful hours in convivial inter-

course, under the poorest of roofs. He had a thoroughly artistic soul, and if he had hitherto lived an ideal life and not wanted or envied the luxuries of wealth, and would have been able even in the most destitute poverty to discover something beautiful to enjoy, he was none the less enchanted with the tasteful magnificence of the princely house in which he now found himself.

He never wearied of treading the marble steps and paths flanked with majestic cypresses leading from the terraces to the leafy depths, over which rose the beautiful villa standing in the shadow of its ever green primeval oak trees. He inhaled with a sigh of contentment the fragrance of the flowers in the carefully tended beds, with which the returning sun filled the air. With ever new and keen delight he stood beneath the lofty portico of the villa, stepped into the cool hall, and walked through the long suites of rooms to the galleries and salons with their priceless art treasures, from the windows of which he looked over the silent mysterious Campagna to the horizon where the sea lay like a silver thread.

In Rome, in his intimate relations with his friends, he had been content to think that his greater talent

in art had made up for their wider knowledge in other ways. With a perfectly justifiable faith in himself, he had been satisfied with his progress and attainments. He had never envied his friends their superior birth, their social position and advantages. It had rarely struck him that they were in any respects better off than himself. But since the priest had introduced him to the Prince and Charlotte, he began to see how deficient he was in that general culture which, till now, he had not missed nor endeavoured to acquire. Sometimes before, he had found it inconvenient that he knew no language except his own; but more accomplished friends had helped him out of the difficulty when it had occurred, and he had thought no more about it. But lately, when he had heard Wilfrid and Adalbert talking fluently with the Prince and Princess, first in one language and then in another, he had deeply felt being shut out of the lively conversation through his ignorance. He saw everything as well as himself in a very different light, since he had left the Piazza Rusticucci and his studio in the Via Margutta.

The solemn stillness which reigned in this abode of nobility and refinement for many generations; the

grandeur and beauty of the natural world around him, impressed him deeply. He believed he had never studied his own character, never understood himself till now. He valued himself more, and at the same time less highly, than hitherto.

When he lingered alone on the stately terraces in the early dawn or fading twilight, and looked down into the billowy valley at his feet, or let his eye wander over the fair stretch of country beyond, it seemed as if he must be lord of it all, as if it were his domain by right, because he rejoiced so much in its beauty. Then, at another time, after working in the chapel, when he stood lost in contemplation before the choicest pictures of the old masters which hung in the great salon, the reflection, "I too am a painter," would expand his soul, and bring tears of happiness to his eyes.

His eye rested with pleasure on the handsomely carved oak furniture in the spacious room he occupied, and the soft silken coverlets on his couch. He arranged his hair more carefully and dressed better than before, because the great Venetian glasses that he had to pass everywhere reflected him so clearly, and he shrank from meeting an unflattering

picture of himself. He enjoyed sitting alone at his meals with the polite old servant waiting silently and respectfully behind his chair. The old man was quite as attentive as he had been during the few days Filippo had stayed at the villa with its master and mistress, when he had come to look at the chapel and to sketch his designs. He could almost imagine he was the Prince!

The wine and the food, even if it was the simplest fare, tasted excellent out of the old cut glass and the quaint dishes. All this had the charm of novelty, while at the same time it came naturally to him, and harmonized so well with his refined tastes that it did not occur to him to consider it was all his only for a time, and that he would soon have to give it up.

He had never been wanting in ambition in his creative art. He had often thought of the immortality of the great masters, and striven to follow in their steps. But now he was seized with a longing to win by his talent, honour, recognition and position, and to enjoy fame in his lifetime.

The library in the villa reminded him how little he had read. Every book he opened showed him what sources of mental enjoyment there were, yet quite

unknown to him. He became passionately absorbed in the classics of his country, and learnt every day to value the inestimable advantage of belonging to a nation whose history was so rich in world-stirring events, and could be traced back to such remote ages as that of the Romans. He, the lonely deserted bastard, learned to understand the pride of ancestry.

With an artist's curiosity he examined the Prince's collection of arms, handled the old pistols, and gloried in the artistic decoration on the hilts of dagger and sword. He deplored that he did not know the use of arms, that he could not shoot or fence as his two friends could, who were not princes either. He was ashamed to be so far behind them in everything except art. He vowed it should not be so any longer.

He would cultivate his mind as the old masters did, for he was fired with a desire to hold his own among the distinguished and great, and with a resolute will, he set himself to the task.

When he was not painting, he was in the library. For the first time in his life he learned what reading means. New wishes, a new world, grew up within him. He spent hours, sometimes half a day, without thinking once of Stella. Her image gave way to the figures of

the poets' heroines who have lived for centuries in all hearts. Beatrice, Laura, Armida, Clorinda hovered about him day and night, tempting him to produce them on canvas. His imagination was crowded with pictures and studies, and if Stella's face still held its place among them, love and the possession of her for his own, was no longer his highest and only longing.

He was bent on self-education, on the development of the powers with which God in His infinite grace had endowed him.

He had a new aim, and a new goal in life.

CHAPTER XIX.

ONE day was very much like another in the villa, and because every day brought its joys, and when it was gone left pleasant remembrances behind it, and because every coming day was anticipated with delight, both Filippo and Stella, wrapped in a delightful dream, quite forgot to measure time. They did not ask how long it was since they had come there and how much longer it would be before they would go away, and no one else asked them. The servants were pleased because they were pleased, and it was such a customary thing for people to stay when they came, that it was taken for granted that the new comers would become inmates of Roccaforte.

The Steward was as proud of the newly built chapel as if he had laid its foundation-stone himself, and did all in his power to show his respect and reverence for the painter who was to adorn it.

Peggy, the faithful old servant, was pleased to have

a young girl to wait on her, to whom she could discourse about England and teach good English manners and habits, for in Peggy's opinion English manners were the only good ones to be acquired in the world.

She had married early in life one of the Harbury Hall gamekeepers, who had left her a widow a few years afterwards. When quite a child she had been in Lady Jane's service, and when her husband died, leaving her childless, she returned to her to wait on Wilfrid, and afterwards, on the death of Lady Jane's sister, was sent as a trusted servant of the family to Stanton House to be Charlotte's nurse, and there she had remained.

Lady Jane and Wilfrid on one side, and her Princess on the other, were the poles between which Peggy's world lay. She had lamented bitterly with tears and grief, that a lady like Miss Fairholm, her 'dear Miss Charlotte,' should leave her own Church and throw herself into the arms of that obnoxious foreign religion. Still she had not refused to obey the Princess's summons to Rome. The thought of her young lady having become a Princess, rather silenced her theological scruples. And certainly the Princess was at liberty to

do what she thought right, and it was no business of hers to interfere.

She had not become at home in the foreign land and among the foreign people. But whatever her Princess admired and loved, she tried to admire and love too, to the best of her ability; and now that Stella had been committed to her charge, she was sorry she had not taken more pains with the language, which even now she did not speak as fluently as she could wish. Of course she could not do better, and she was sure her Princess would approve it, than impress upon this Italian girl from morning to night, what infinitely superior beings the English were to the Italians, how much better everything was in beloved England than here, what a beautiful place Harbury Hall was, where Mr. Wilfrid was born, and how even that was not so grand and lovely as Stanton Court, her Princess's country seat.

Stella heard all this with keen pleasure and was never tired of listening to Peggy's histories.

In the mornings she generally sat a few hours to Filippo. But if this was not necessary, she went to Sister Monica's school with Peggy, whose duty it was

to see that the school-girls were cleanly and neat in their appearance; and when Filippo did not take her with him for his evening stroll (he had almost given up doing so now), Stella was left entirely to Peggy's society, till the late hour when Filippo came in to have an English lesson.

One day, about three weeks after Stella's arrival, she and Peggy had taken their evening meal with the Steward and his family and had retired to Peggy's room, where she never missed taking her cup of tea. Stella brought the tea-things, and arranged them as Peggy had taught her to do. The old woman praised her handiness in English; and Stella, not understanding her, but seeing by the expression of her face that she was pleased with her, said with a little curtsy, "Thank you, Ma'am."

"That's right! well done!" exclaimed the English-woman, highly delighted. "That's the way to learn; and if you try you will speak our dear language before your brother, for girls always learn languages quicker than boys, and you won't be the first who has learnt English from me, I have taught many a one! You can say 'Good morning' and 'Good evening,' and two or three other little things already. Say when

your brother comes presently 'Good evening, my dear.' It will please him."

She said it over slowly, and Stella repeated it after her to her teacher's satisfaction and then made the tea for her. As she handed it to her she said: "Signora, is it because you are not in good health that you drink these herbs every day."

"Not in good health? not healthy? No, indeed, thank God, I have always been strong."

"Then why do you like drinking hot water and herbs?"

"Why? Because every sane person in England has his cup of tea every morning and evening. It is one of our customs."

"Every one!" repeated Stella, "the men too?"

"Every one! I tell you it is a custom in England."

"Does the Milordo drink tea?" asked Stella.

"Who is that, child?"

"The relation of her Highness, he is a painter and Filippo's friend," answered Stella, turning away to hide her burning blushes, for it was the first time she had had the courage to ask about the man who occupied her thoughts day and night, and whom Fi-

lippo had never mentioned since he had found her that day in Nilo's studio.

"Milordo?" said Peggy. "The only relation my mistress, the Princess, has got in Rome is Mr. Wilfrid Harbury, the sweet boy I washed and dressed. He's no lord! But he deserves to be, I am sure. There wasn't a cleverer, prettier child than he is in all England. You should have seen him in his white frock and blue sash with his sturdy, naked little legs, and plump neck, and his golden hair, that I used to curl over my finger every day. No painted Child Jesus in the churches or your angels over the altars are half as pretty as he was then when I nursed him. He was so good and gentle too."

"Ah, he is good, very good!" exclaimed Stella. "I know him, I know how good he is."

"You know how good he is? How did you get to know him, pray?"

Stella had expected this question, and with her young heart beating, and the blood glowing in her veins, she related to the astonished Peggy, where she had first met the Milordo, how he had walked besides Filippo behind her father's coffin; how he had spoken words of sympathy to her by her father's grave, and

then how she had seen him again in Nilo's studio, when the Princess had bid her pray that the Saviour would make the Milordo a good Christian as he had made her, for it was so sad that he should be a heretic."

Peggy could hardly trust her ears. "What!" she cried, aflame with wrath, "Lady Jane's son a heretic! Convert *him*? I am quite sure, dear Lady Jane would rather see him buried with his father in the Harbury Hall vault, than converted as you call it. It is sinful and disgraceful that a creature such as you—for what are you but a painter's model?—should be stuck up in God's house as our Lord's Mother, and that the people—my Princess Charlotte among them—should throw themselves on their knees before *you* and mutter prayers like heathens. And you are to pray, that Mr. Wilfrid shall fall away too. Dreadful, dreadful! quite terrible!"

"I *never did* hear such a thing!" she said again, shaking her head and bringing her hand down on the table with a thump, so that the cups and saucers rattled. Her limbs trembled, although she was an experienced old nurse, and did not allow herself as a rule to be easily upset. Still uttering broken exclama-

tions of anger, she rose from her comfortable arm-chair, went to her cupboard, brought out the flask of brandy, which she always kept in readiness for cases of necessity, and poured a good portion into her tea. This gradually restored her equanimity, and she turned to look at Stella.

The girl had taken refuge in a corner of the room, and was kneeling with her head buried in the cushions of an old sofa, crying and sobbing like a child.

She had only understood the first few words of Peggy's harangue, for the angry woman, overcome by her feelings, had soon abandoned the Italian language for her own, and the violence with which she had pronounced the words "Dreadful! dreadful!" and the angry look which had accompanied them, had sounded in Stella's ears like a curse from which she must protect herself.

Meanwhile Mistress Peggy had become calmer. She could not think what had made her forget herself so easily. She had most disrespectfully condemned the command which the Princess had given the girl; of course, her lady must have known what she was doing when she told her to pray for her cousin! She had

rated the poor child, whom the Princess had wished her to treat kindly, and made her cry her eyes out.

“It all comes of being in such a country!” she said. “Who is to know here what will happen next? At home everything went its natural course as evenly and regularly as clock-work! But here? Here everything is in a muddle, laughing and praying and singing and tingling of bells, and pictures, so that one doesn’t know whether one is on one’s head or one’s heels.” Then passing from English into Italian again she said to make amends: “Come, Stella, be reasonable and don’t cry; you have misunderstood me. I meant, one shouldn’t steal!”

“Oh, Signora, I haven’t stolen!” Stella cried.

“Who said you had? I mean you should never tamper with another’s possession, and religion is everybody’s most costly possession. Don’t I let you cross yourself? Do I scold you for muttering prayers ten times over, behind a string of beads, instead of praying out of a sensible prayer book? you can’t help it, you know no better, and my Princess is pleased that you should do it. But”—and again her face wore the dark severe expression—“but Mr. Wilfrid shall *not* cross himself. Remember that! Mr. Wilfrid’s

mother would hate and detest you—if she had heard what you said just now. Yes, hate and detest you, as she did the Princess, when—”

Respect for her mistress prevented her finishing her speech. She got up, took another cup from the cupboard and poured out some tea for Stella, who was still in her corner.

“Come! Here’s a good strong cup of tea for you. Don’t tell such stupid things again and I’ll say no more.”

Stella, always sweet tempered and gentle, came to the table again, but refused the tea Peggy offered her. “No, thank you,” she said. “I am not ill, I am only sad, Signora, and I don’t think tea will do me any good. It is getting late, and if you will give me leave I will go to bed and—”

She could not trust herself to say she would pray. But Peggy knew what she meant. “Go,” she said, “and do what you have been brought up to. The Lord and Saviour is merciful even to poor sinners and heathens.”

“I have not done anything wicked,” said Stella. Peggy held out her hand and Stella seized it, looking at her wistfully and sadly. A feeling of loneliness

had come over her, and a foreboding that some great misfortune would happen to her in this beautiful place; and she had come there so full of hope and joyous expectation, and she had liked Peggy so much.

“Good night!” she said faintly and crept into the room next Peggy’s parlour where she slept; but when she was in bed she tossed about and did not sleep.

She could not get out of her head that the Milordo’s mother would hate and detest her because she prayed for his conversion. The man she looked upon almost as her good genius and whom she loved. Ah, how she loved him!

CHAPTER XX.

IT was the middle of February. The great bell of the palace of the Conservatori on the Capitol rang in the Carnival. Masks began to appear in the streets, and Charlotte, with other distinguished ladies of the Roman nobility, dressed in the habit of the sisterhood to which they all belonged, went down from the Capitol to the Coliseum, to do penance at the Stations of the Cross there for all those who intended during the next four days to abandon themselves in the vortex of the Carnival to all kinds of worldly pleasures.

The days were lengthening, and the beauty of the spring made the Prince long for the country life in the villa; for years society and its amusements had ceased to have any charms for him. But he considered it his duty to keep his house open during the Carnival, and was pleased to see Charlotte testifying her real love of his church, by practising its out-

ward religious usages, in common with the women of ancient and noble lineage, to whose level he had raised her.

It was a long established custom of the Prince's family to remain in Rome till the end of the Carnival, and, if the Princess enjoyed more than ever her high position in society at the Prince's side at this time, it made her still happier to think that he was looking forward to the delight of sharing solitude with her in the Campagna.

This year the Princess, in spite of the attractions which the pageantry of the Carnival had for her, would have been glad to go out to Roccaforte earlier than usual. The picture for her chapel was very much in her mind, and her presence as well as that of the Prince were needed in the villa for its further execution.

When Filippo had been first consulted about the picture, the Princess had confided to him how much she admired the old masters, for not disdaining to incorporate in their compositions the personages under whose patronage they painted them; and Filippo with delicate intuition, had understood her wishes.

While Wilfrid questioned how far this would be permissible, without disturbing the artistic harmony of

the picture, and Adalbert sneered at the Princess's desire as being prompted by mere vulgar vanity and the religious mania of a convert, Filippo saw in it the longing of a loving heart to outlive the limits of human life with the husband she loved, in the monument which she had raised for the devotion and worship of future generations. He had often experienced the same kind of feeling when Stella's figure had grown on the canvas before him, and perhaps this was why he so readily fell in with the Princess's idea.

With the ingenuity of a true master he had introduced, in the first small sketches he had submitted for his patroness's approval, the figures of the noble pair on the right and left of the Virgin among the marriage witnesses: the Prince was dressed in the antique Spanish costume which he wore at all great ceremonies, as the representative of one of the most honourable posts in the papal court, and the Princess, in a suitable and not less handsome toilette. But Filippo had arranged his composition so skilfully that there was nothing strikingly incongruous in the appearance of these figures, though attired so differently from the rest of the group, and it was decided that Filippo should first paint two life-sized pictures of the Prince

and Princess for the family portrait gallery in the Roccaforte palace at Rome, and afterwards use these portraits as a guide for the sacred picture.

While the Prince and Charlotte were thus in thought half way to Roccaforte, the gaieties and entertainments in their own house followed each other in quick succession. And since Filippo had left Rome and Wilfrid had returned from his short expedition, he came a great deal oftener than before to the house of his distinguished relations.

At present there was a coolness between him and Adalbert, indeed since their last conversation about Stella, Wilfrid had learnt how much the harmony of their friendship had depended on Filippo. He had been the bond of union and kept the balance even, between them. Wilfrid and Adalbert, where art was not the question, differed widely. There were subjects on which, with Filippo, they could talk easily and freely, but which, when alone with each other, they could not broach on neutral ground. Lippo's Italian nature received no shock from Adalbert's occasional coarseness and avowed sensuality; indeed he was used to hear the relations of the sexes freely discussed, and things called by their right names in a way which

would have jarred upon the more sensitively refined Wilfrid; while on the other hand, Adalbert refrained from any flippant or irreverent strictures on religious subjects in Filippo's presence.

It was a mutual sympathy and interest in the Italian which had drawn the two Northerners together, and their love and appreciation of him which had united them for so long a time. For years they had associated daily with each other, and had been on the best possible terms; now, all at once, it was over. The seed of dislike had taken root between them, and as Filippo was not there to check it, it grew and threatened to separate them. They no longer sought each other regularly at certain hours, and when they did, rarely found each other. For Adalbert had become acquainted with a widow belonging to the bourgeois class, who showed herself willing to become something more to him than the long desired model for his second waiting woman; and he spent most of his time in her society. This had often happened before, indeed the two others had treated it as a joke, when the third suddenly disappeared, fancied himself in a seventh heaven for a time, then came back to them from his fool's

paradise sobered and subdued. Santo and Milordo had gone on just the same without him; and had met at the coffee-houses, restaurants and artists' club as usual, for long habit had endeared these places to them.

Now that he was alone, the tavern bars, and the tobacco fumes of the *Café Greco*, the noise and confusion of the club, were all odious to Wilfrid. Never before had the want of cleanliness, the bad air, and the crowded space affected him so much. The society of artists was uncongenial now his two comrades were no longer among them; although he strove against it that uncomfortable and excessive clear-sightedness had come over him which is the experience of us all when our inner life and emotions are pointing towards a great crisis, and an entire recasting of our outward circumstances. Against his will he took quite another view of the surroundings which he had deliberately chosen, and the men whom he had accustomed himself to look upon with friendly eyes, now seemed unfamiliar and almost strangers to him.

It pained him that he found no pleasure in what once had pleased him. But he could not help it, and with his work it was not much better. Since he

had confessed his dissatisfaction with the fruits of his artistic labour, since he had known Stella, and since his confidential conversation with Charlotte, he had done nothing. He took down sketch after sketch that had once delighted him, and tossed them aside with a sigh, without adding a line to them. He often earnestly wished that he was without means, that the sharp pinch of poverty might urge him to produce the pictures which had always found purchasers so quickly. He reproached himself as unmanly, because he had no tenacity of purpose, no self-command, and then the Romeo canvas would be placed on the easel, and his whole thoughts, longing and desires absorbed in the object which he had resolved as a matter of duty to forget.

Now that his days were no longer filled with earnest work, they passed slowly and drearily. In the evening, when he saw he had accomplished nothing, he vowed he would go away. But when the morning came, he still went from the force of habit to his studio, and as he surveyed his handiwork, he told himself he was bound to finish what he had begun, what he could only complete here in Rome and in that Campagna, whose hills and slopes became ever a softer and richer

green, whose white gleaming towns and little specks of hamlets seemed to beckon him more invitingly every-day. When he was once fairly on the way, as he believed, to leave the rooms and the studio which he had occupied for years, his heart became full of a strange, anxious superstition and a voice within him said, "If you wrench yourself away now, you will never come back to Rome. You will not see Stella again; for if Rome is eternal, youth and beauty are perishable." Then arose the painful thought, "What will become of her? To whose lot will she fall?" These questions racked his brain continually, and, dissatisfied with himself, he sought the society of Charlotte, the companion and confidante of his youth, to escape from the strife and vexation of his own heart. To her he was more than ever welcome, and the Prince, with whom he had always been a favourite enjoyed and valued his almost daily visits.

The Prince, like all genial and experienced men of the world, enjoyed associating with younger people with whom he could recall his own youth, and to whom he acted the part of mentor when he considered them worth the trouble. He had never ap-

proved of Wilfrid's confining himself so entirely to the artist world. "When I was travelling in your country," he said to Wilfrid one day, "as you are in ours, I was anxious to learn the true character of the people by mixing with them in their every day life, and observing them closely in crowded streets and popular resorts; but I did not neglect the literary world and upper ten thousand on that account, as you seem to be doing, and thus following the example of most of the artists here. By this time you must have exhausted all that the hills, and the Campagna, the streets, theatres, coffee-houses and museums of Rome have to offer. But," he added laughing, "our villas and castles are in Italy too; we are as much Italians as the people in the highways and hedges. If you will only do as I propose, and try our country life, everything I possess shall be at the service of your art: man, woman, child, man-servant, maid-servant, ox, and all the rest of it."

"Oh," exclaimed Charlotte, "if we could only tempt Wilfrid out to Roccaforte, I should exercise all my fascinations to keep him there till we leave the place for Anciesella; he is totally ignorant of Italian life in a country house! I assure you, my friend, it is not less charming in the Romagna than at Lariccia

or on the Sabine hills, and you will find our abode much more comfortable than your artist quarters there.”

Wilfrid was compelled to agree, and own the justice of these impeachments; still he hesitated to accept the proposal made to him in such a spirit. Charlotte observed this and said no more. The Prince, believing this to be pique, persisted in his persuasions. He was himself a great sportsman and knew Wilfrid to be a good shot; so he held out as an attraction the prospect of the approaching duck and snipe season, for wild fowl abounded in the lakes and marches of Roccaforte, and at last Wilfrid gave in and consented to accept the Prince's hospitality.

The day and hour for the departure of the Prince's household were fixed, and Wilfrid promised to follow as soon as he could arrange to do so. In the midst of a lively conversation on sport and the different manner in which it was conducted in England and Italy, the Prince was called away on business. The two men took leave of each other, and as Wilfrid was going to bid his cousin good-bye, she said, “I was not so pressing in my invitation as the Prince, for I understand your hesitation and respect

your scruples. But I am delighted that you are coming, for I can't bear my husband's wishes to be crossed, and he meant it so kindly. You will be your own master entirely, and can come and go as you like, and may leave Roccaforte whenever you please."

Wilfrid assured her that he was grateful to the Prince for his kindness, and was only too happy to turn it to account.

"Very well then, let us hope for long delicious days," she said cheerfully; "after all we are only like children who imagine they are having their own way, because they cannot see the leading strings of a higher Power's wise guidance, which brings them in the end to the right goal."

"What does that mean?" he asked quickly.

Charlotte saw that her words had affected him as she desired. "Nothing, nothing at all," she replied, "it was only a general observation, which I made because at the moment I was thinking of our last conversation. But I am not doing right in reminding you of what you are wisely perhaps trying to forget. So, au revoir, till we meet in Roccaforte, my friend—au revoir."

She seemed suddenly anxious for him to go. He

thanked her again, pressed her hand, and went, forcing himself to a calmness which he did not feel.

He asked himself if he had had any choice? Could he pretend that there was anything to keep him in Rome? No, he must go to Roccaforte at least for a few days, or the Prince would think him unsociable and deficient in courtesy, and Charlotte herself would be offended if he did not keep his promise now that he had made it.

He earnestly wished that it was not a necessity of his nature to meditate and thus to probe his own motives and those of others. He would have given anything to be frivolous and easy going like Adalbert, at least in this case. Why should he think of the consequences of the fair prospect that lay before him, when he was urged into what he had striven to resist, although he had ardently longed for it? What harm could there be in granting himself the pleasure of once more seeing Stella before he left Italy? Why should he not paint her picture to take with him as a keepsake, she, who was the personification of his ideal of maidenly, youthful, beauty, she whom he loved and who loved him so intensely, so fervently?

The composure and the calm resolution with which he

had gone to the palace had deserted him; he believed he could never regain them. But he must and would go to Roccaforte; for *she* was there. With her image before his eyes and in his heart he fell asleep, only to be tormented by ghastly visions and wild passionate dreams.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE day before her departure, the Princess went early to confession. In the evening the priest, as she had requested him, came again to see her. The Prince saw this close intimacy between his wife and the priest with ever increasing satisfaction, for however much he might trust her, it was a relief to him to know that the wife who was young enough to be his daughter, relied so entirely upon such an experienced and trustworthy person as Don Matteo for protection and advice.

They had invited him to spend his summer holiday with them either at Roccaforte or Anciesella, whichever he preferred, and as the conversation came round to the proposed visit, after touching on various other subjects, the Princess remarked that their residence at the villa would be longer this year than in previous ones.

“Filippo,” she said, “must have time to finish

our portraits, and I have asked my cousin to come out to us. He has undertaken a historical picture, for which Stella is to be model."

The priest shook his head and raised his finger with a warning gesture. "Highness," he said, "you yourself told me of the dangerous little romance between your cousin and this girl Stella. It is not wise to bring fire too near gunpowder. To expose people to temptation unnecessarily, is tempting God's wrath."

"The girl is at present a member of my household, and my cousin is a man of honour and a gentleman," the Princess answered with proud decision.

"But he is human and young also, and," remarked the priest, "the maiden loves him passionately."

"Yes," interrupted the Princess eagerly, "but not so madly as he loves her, and because he loves her for her innocence—" She broke off, and then added as the priest watched her earnestly, "He will either fly from Stella, or—marry her."

"Marry her? Your cousin is a man of high birth, Highness, and is not a member of our holy Church!"

The Princess looked straight at him with large sparkling eyes. "You, Don Matteo, have surely not forgotten that love transforms the human mind, and, in

truth, works miracles. Have you never experienced a case when the Lord kindles a passion in us, which leads us to him, and gives us a twofold share of happiness and consolation?"

The priest was taken by surprise; but a new conversion, the conversion of a wealthy and distinguished Englishman by his own instrumentality, was a consideration which put his personal wishes with regard to Stella and his nephew in the background.

"Yes, Highness," he said after a pause, "God knows I have experienced it in your own blessed case, and I am ever thankful to Him that He used me as His instrument. But the inspiration comes from above, the spirit must be there, and whether Mr. Wilfrid has it yet?" He stopped short. "At any rate, let us hope we are not deceived, and it will be a blessed thing if you have an opportunity of performing the Christian duty of leading the erring into the right path."

He paused; Charlotte seemed to expect that he would make some further remark, but he was on his guard. He knew men, knew his penitents better than they knew themselves; and it was not his business to hinder a conversion to the mother Church when such a thing was in the remotest degree possible. The Prin-

cess's influence and interest were capable of accomplishing much, and he knew her to be a confederate of inestimable value. She must surely know her ground now, and everything was worth the trial; but she should be alone responsible for what she thus arbitrarily undertook. Only it was not to his mind that Stella should be needlessly sacrificed, for it was his duty as her father confessor to be careful for her interests.

"I admire and respect your intentions, Highness," he said at last, "but great care and caution are necessary in such cases, and a bridle must be put on self-interest, should it creep in. To decide another's fate is a heavy responsibility, and one we may often have cause to repent that we have undertaken, and Stella is pure and guileless; but she knows, innocent as she is, thanks to my teaching and care, what is involved in love for a heretic, and——?"

"And her opinion in that respect shall remain the same," interposed the Princess. "Do you think I do not hold it too?"

"Your Highness knows that such doubts were far from me. I commit Stella's future with full confidence into your hands. If what you wish and hope for your cousin succeeds, the cousin whose friendship you value

so highly, all will be well. But should it not succeed," he raised his calm, serious eyes reverently towards heaven—"then the Father of us all, in his goodness and wisdom, will point out another way in which you may benefit the brave orphan girl, whom he has gifted with such singular beauty, the precious prize which her virtue must defend and preserve in moments of temptation. Stand by her in this, Princess, now that she is withdrawn from my spiritual supervision!"

Charlotte nodded assent. A pause ensued, then the priest rose. His business as the physician of the Princess's soul was over. His face brightened, and his voice had a cheerful ring in it.

They had both gone to the window and stood there looking out. A beautiful pair of roan horses were led across the yard from the carriage house to the stables. Marco, who had been hanging leisurely about, helped to unharness them. "If I could only see Marco settled!" the priest said with a sigh, "he is very much on my mind. I often reproach myself with having neglected him in earlier days, and for taking more pains with the souls entrusted to my care than with one whom the Lord has bound to me by the ties of blood."

"It is the duty then," the Princess rejoined, "of

those for whose sake you have neglected him, to offer compensation, Don Matteo. He seems to be a clever youth. A place will turn up for him in time, and when he has definite employment he will lose that unsteadiness which you told me once made you uneasy about him. I will bear him in mind. And if I should happen to forget, you must remind me of him." The good priest promised to do so, feeling confidence in the Princess's good will; soon after he took his leave.

Early the next morning the whole staff of servants with carriages, horses and luggage, started for the Campagna. The Prince and Princess followed late in the afternoon.

As on the evening when Stella had arrived at the villa, the sun had sunk low in the west, when the carriage which brought Prince Salvatore and Charlotte stopped at the entrance of Roccaforte. The Steward and his family, all the servants with Peggy at their head, stood ready to receive their master and mistress. Filippo had come out, and Stella also, but she kept timidly in the background.

The Prince helped his wife out of the carriage himself. Old Peggy was in a transport of joy to have her mistress near her again. She took her shawl and

fan and small hand-bag from the servant who carried them, while Charlotte gave her a warm and affectionate greeting. The Prince, as he walked to the house, spoke a few kindly words to his retainers, and the Steward assured him that the estate was in a most flourishing condition. They were entering the house when the Prince became aware of the painter's presence.

"There you are!" he exclaimed pleasantly, then, measuring him with a friendly eye, he added: "But what have you done to yourself, Signor Filippo? You are quite transformed! Our air out here has done wonders. You look infinitely stronger, and, if you had not reached manhood, I should say you had grown. I am really delighted to see you looking so well."

Charlotte repeated her husband's compliment and Filippo could only reply that the work they had been kind enough to lay out for him, had been a source of enjoyment to him, and the walks in the grounds an unwonted pleasure.

"Ah, wait a little! you will like it still better now we are here," Charlotte said lightly. "In an hour—?"

"That's enough!" her husband whispered, who had guessed her intention of asking the painter to sup

with them, then he said aloud: "Yes, you are right, it is near supper time, we must get rid as soon as possible of the dust we have accumulated on the road. Come Carlotta! Good evening, Signore, we shall meet to-morrow." But when Filippo had turned to go, he looked round at him again. His improved appearance seemed to please him immensely. He remarked upon it to Charlotte. "Yes," she said, "it confirms the truth of our English saying about change of air being a cure for everything. Now that he carries himself properly, one can see the shape of his fine head." She turned and waved her hand gracefully to Filippo as she went in, while Stella stood unnoticed among the rest of the servants.

It was not till the Princess was in her dressing-room with Peggy, talking English, and brushing her mistress' hair vigorously to her infinite satisfaction, as she had done in old times in dear England, that she asked how she liked the girl confided to her care.

Peggy broke off in her repeated expressions of gratification at having her mistress with her again to say that my lady had of course been right in her judgment. Stella was a good child, obedient, industrious, modest, and clever at her work, and she

must confess that even in England it would be hard to find one in a thousand to compare with her; but—

“Well, what complaint have you to make against her?”

“Oh, no complaint, I have no complaint to make against anything you think so highly of, my lady. But a change has come over the child since she has been here. She is not so bright as she was at first, she has lost her fresh colour, and become as quiet as a mouse, and is always at her prayers.”

“Does she pray much then?” asked the Princess.

“God forbid my lady,” said Peggy eagerly, “that I should find fault with her for that, but her rosary which she only used to hang round her at first when she went every evening to Sister Monica’s prayers, is now dangling at her apron all day, and directly she has finished her work, and I have not given her anything else to occupy her with, she mumbles at those beads one after the other from the very first to the very last, then crosses herself and asks a blessing.” Peggy shrugged her shoulders, then continued in a very decided tone: “She spends a great deal too much time over it. I am afraid, my lady, she is not the

sort to do for your service. She would suit a convent better, and the Sister thinks so too."

The Princess took no particular notice of this. She told Peggy to ring for the lady's maid to bring her dress. Then, deftly winding the heavy plaits of hair into an Apollo's knot at the back of her head, she asked: "And the painter, Stella's foster-brother, does he trouble himself about her, is he much with her?"

The old woman's face beamed. "Oh, my lady!" she exclaimed, "he is a fine young man: a real gentleman, though he's only a painter by profession. And so hardworking, and so fond of learning! He wants to know everything. He comes every evening to learn a bit of English with me, and they are both getting on splendidly, the young man as well as Stella. And Orlando, the Steward's eldest son, who is here on leave, can't think how the painter comes by it all, how easily he takes to shooting and fencing and all the rest of it. And then he's such a one for books."

"And does he see Stella often," asked the Princess again.

"Very seldom, my lady! If he does not want her for the painting, hardly ever. And if you don't mind

hearing the truth, I believe it is that she's fretting about. Only the other day she told him before me that he was playing the great gentleman, that he was always blaming her, and treating her as if she weren't good enough for him."

"And what did he say to that? Was he put out?"

"No, indeed, my lady! He is always as gentle and nice as possible. He laughed and said:

'As I was once, I was not good enough for you because there were others who pleased you better. Now I'll grow like those others if I can, and perhaps please others better than I do you.' Then she looked down and left the room quietly. And I asked no questions; for you see, my lady, it was not any business of mine."

"And you know nothing more? Stella has not confided in you?"

"No, my lady," said Peggy, who, if she knew when she had better not ask questions also knew when it was advisable to answer them as shortly as possible.

The Princess said no more, and as she was now dressed for the evening, stepped out on the balcony. She liked the feeling of being outside the walls of

a town, outside a crowd, in which the individual is lost to a certain extent, however important he may be. From her earliest youth, she had delighted to reign in solitude, and had felt this delight keenly when, after the London season, she had retired to the beautiful place in Wales, which was hers and hers alone. Now that she stood on the ground on which a long and noble lineage had been reared, the happiness in possession was still greater. There was only one thing wanting, and to obtain that, she would have given all her acres in Wales and the whole of her enormous fortune. It was the son which the Prince longed for, and had expected when he married her, the heir to the honourable title and possessions which he by his self-sacrifice had restored to the house of Roccaforte.

The pain of being without a child was ever at her heart, for she loved the Prince and admired the resignation with which he bore what must be a still heavier trial for him.

And now, while she stood once more on the proud heights and gazed down with eyes full of rapture into the dusky woods below, unconsciously the words passed her lips, "Who will stand on this spot in years to come,

who will rule here when he has gone down to the grave, and the arms of Roccaforte are buried with him, when I shall look into this happy valley no more?"

Tears rushed to her eyes, she covered them with her hand and re-entered her apartment just as the sun sank beneath the horizon and evening closed in apace.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE next morning, the Prince sent for Filippo. He was sitting at the breakfast table with his wife, and the picture of refined domestic life made a pleasant impression upon the artist.

The thoroughly Roman, somewhat imperious appearance of the Prince, seemed milder and less imposing in the short loose velvet coat he wore. The Princess looked very young and charming in her pretty negligée of white cashmere with coloured bows. A delicious perfume of flowers from the terrace filled the whole room, and, though the glass doors which opened into the gallery were open, a bright fire burned on the marble hearth, the reflection of which mingled with the broad bands of sunshine on the Persian carpet, and flickered on the pure marble.

The Prince, after a few words of friendly greeting, at once began business. He asked if Filippo was ready to begin the two portraits immediately, whether

he intended to work at them at the same time, or preferred to finish one first. Filippo decided to do the former, and in this the Prince acquiesced, saying, it was his opinion that the painter's eye is more unbiassed in its judgment when it is not fixed without interruption on the same object. After it had been settled that the Princess should give Filippo the first sitting that day, they began to talk about the picture for the chapel.

The Princess had sent for the velvet dress, old lace and ornaments which she wished to wear in the picture. Filippo said he should like to see her in the costume before he began the portrait, and as the Prince wished her to comply with the request, she left the room to attire herself in the antique costume.

Thus Filippo found himself alone with the Prince for the first time. It made him feel awkward and uncomfortable, although he could not have said why. The Prince, however, put him at his ease, by asking him to accompany him into the gallery; and as they walked through the long arcades, to the winding flight of steps flanked with a balustrade which led into the open air, he said he had heard with pleasure that Filippo had been turning his time there to the best ac-

count. He remarked with still greater satisfaction, how much the few weeks' stay in the hills and the bodily exercise had benefited him. At that time athletic sports were universally neglected, he said, in Italy; especially among the middle classes. The English and Germans alone understood the immense importance of physical development.

"I hear you have been trying your hand at fencing with Orlando, and at rowing on the lake; and I should not wonder if you had been a canter or two on horseback. That stretch of free country that we see from where we are now standing, tempts one to ride over it."

"I have felt the desire, your Highness," replied Filippo, "and Orlando was anxious that I should satisfy it. But the horse he offered me was a somewhat fiery animal, and as I have never learnt to ride, I did not care to risk an accident which might disable me for days, and hinder me in the performance of my duties."

"Bravo. I admire you for it!" exclaimed the Prince. "But you shall learn riding, so that you may be able to enjoy the glorious exercise when you get the chance. I will see about a quiet horse for you.

I won't forget it. But, by the way, where do you hail from originally? Are you a native of the provinces, or a Roman?"

"I have grown up in a Roman workshop," answered Filippo evasively.

"Ah, yes, I remember," said the Prince. "The priest told the Princess about that. You were the adopted son of the ill-fated Apparatore. But where did you come from? Who were your parents?"

This was Filippo's tender spot which he could not endure to be touched, and the question was more distasteful to him than usual, coming as it did from the lips of a man whose striking and aristocratic personality made his heart thrill, as it did when he looked at a work of art. Here, in the place, where the son not only received life from the father, but a long line of illustrious ancestors; in this castle, the owners of which, through their wide and honourable connections, could trace back the history of their kindred into a far past and far away countries, he had felt more sharply than before what an intense misery, what an undeserved disgrace it is, to belong to no one, to call no one your own, to be an outcast, not even knowing the name of your parents.

He had never spoken of this to his friends, never referred to it in the remotest way, to his father confessor, who of course knew it, and yet at this moment he felt tempted to tell it all to this nobleman, who stood so infinitely far above him. He thought it would do him good, and make his heart lighter for the future, if he could learn that the blot on his name, of which he was innocent, would not make him an object of scorn and derision among the great and renowned, whose level he so earnestly desired to reach. Something which he could not explain made him hope that this experienced man, on whom fortune had smiled, would not value him the less because of his dark and unknown origin. He thought he would tell him all, he believed he knew how to put it; and then shyness, and fear of ill success, drove the confession back into the depths of his heart.

What should he do if the Prince blamed him for not being open with him? Suppose he withdrew his confidence, and refused to communicate personally with him in the future? What a different aspect that would put on everything, how it would take the edge off his enjoyment in the work which lay before him, to which he was bound to devote himself for many months.

These considerations passed in rapid succession through his mind: but with an effort he collected himself, and, evading the Prince's question, he told him hurriedly that he had been destined for the trade of ornamenting churches, and had had no other education but that which the lowest classes of the cloister schools afford very poor children. The little he knew, he owed partly to himself, and partly to intercourse with his two friends Adalbert and Wilfrid.

"So you have the satisfaction to be what the English call a self-made man," said the Prince, "and it strikes me there is something really great in that."

"Yes, when one has climbed the hill, but the way is rough and difficult; yet," he added honestly, "I have never had reason to complain of poverty. I was always well cared for till I could support myself. Not knowing what luxury is, I did not desire it. But what I deplore most is my scanty knowledge and utter want of culture. It is a bitter thing, to expose our ignorance constantly before the friends we love best, and before those whom we honour and whose regard we earnestly desire to win."

The Prince smiled and said warmly, "If you refer to me, set your mind at rest. He who knows what

his failings are, as you do, is sure to find a means of remedying them.

“I have lost so much time,” Filippo sighed. “How many precious hours I have frittered away with my companions, who could afford to waste them because they already possessed what I had not made a step towards obtaining. Their culture came to them like a legacy from their fathers, and—” he interrupted himself, for he was close to on the ground which he wished to avoid.

The Prince helped him out. “Our fathers don’t always bequeath to us only desirable things as an inheritance; they make over to us a host of difficulties and responsibilities as well. I, for example, at your age was encumbered with them and spent some years in setting myself free.” He paused, then said with considerate kindness, “Where there’s a will there’s a way, young man! Here there is nothing to disturb you. It is not possible to paint on and on all day. Devote yourself to study while you are here, and when you want advice, rely on me. My library, and any assistance I am able to offer are at your service. But,” he exclaimed, before the surprised and delighted Filippo could thank him, “the Princess will be wait-

ing. Come! The costume is well chosen, I don't think you will find anything to object to in it. Come, Filippo!"

It was the first time he had addressed him without prefixing the formal "Signor" before his name, and Filippo was not unmindful of this mark of his confidence.

An hour later he sat at his easel in the beautiful salon, which, with its perfectly arranged lights, had been fitted up as his studio. The Princess, richly attired in ruby velvet, stood gracefully but proudly opposite him, in a well chosen attitude. The Prince, who had remained till it was decided in which direction the head should be turned, had left the studio to attend to the numerous business matters connected with his estate, which awaited him after his long sojourn in the city; but before he left the room, he intimated to Filippo that he must not keep the Princess standing too long in case she should be tired, and that she must be in time for the midday meal, which was served at an early hour in the villa. When he reached the door, he turned round once more to say that he expected Filippo to lunch with them, and that

for the future he should prefer his joining them at meals, instead of taking them alone.

The Princess looked from one to the other with unconcealed gratification, kissed her hand to her husband, and then, resuming the desired position with much precision, said, "The Prince's invitation shows you have made a conquest of him. I assure you, you may congratulate yourself, for he is as cautious as he is generous in dispensing his favours. Your efforts for self-improvement, I mean your industrious study, of which the Steward has told him, combined with your being a master in your art, has doubtless won his favour. He is always pleased to see high aims and aspirations. The motto of our house makes it only natural that he should."

"And what is that?" asked Filippo, as his eyes studied the Princess's slight and erect figure.

"Have you not read it on the escutcheon over the portico? '*Aspiro, spero!*' 'I strive, I hope!'"

"Oh!" exclaimed Filippo, "it shall be my watchword for the future, as it has been from my earliest childhood, without my knowing it!" And with fine bold strokes he inscribed the two words in large

letters on the outer margin of the canvas, on which the outline of the beautiful woman was already visible.

He then worked in silence, till the Princess asked him if he knew that she had a pleasant surprise in store for him.

He answered in the negative, adding that he had no doubt that what she planned, would be something most agreeable.

“Well,” she went on, “I am not quite sure whether you will be pleased after all, for a little self-denial is necessary on your part to pay for the pleasure. I have now and then had experience of the selfishness of men, and have read about what people call ‘artists’ envy’ in the biographies of great masters, as well as having heard so much of its actual existence, that I cannot be certain of the consequences of my proposal.”

She kept him waiting some little time before she spoke again, then she said,

“I have asked my cousin Wilfrid to spend part of the spring here, and have promised him that Stella shall be his model for Juliet.”

Filippo looked up from his work; she saw how amazed he was. But in spite of the doubts she had just expressed about his readiness to fall in with her scheme, she added in a decided tone, for she had been used to command and to be obeyed all her life, "Any how, Signor, you will be kind enough to submit with a good grace to what is unavoidable, for since Stella is under my protection I alone am reponsible for her," then she continued half in jest, "You would not surely wish to prove yourself envious of your friend."

"I never have been envious, Highness," replied Filippo with an earnestness which contrasted strikingly with the Princess's lightly spoken words; "but if Stella is now under your protection, she has been my charge for many years. Her dying mother laid her in my arms when I myself was little more than a boy, and exhorted me to take care of her; and now she is fatherless too. I could not let her sink to the degradation and shame which awaits almost without exception the models in the artist world. I have guarded her anxiously, and suspiciously protected her from others as—" he stopped, a dark flush suffused his

brow, and he held up his head proudly and defiantly. The Princess watched him with astonishment, and thought he looked quite majestic as he went on, "I have protected her from others, from herself and from myself, and I blessed the hour when you removed her from Rome, the scene of her temptation."

He had ceased drawing, and the Princess had forgotten to pose.

"Give me your hand," she cried, coming to him with hers outstretched, "you are a noble creature, Filippo. I know more than you think, I know all! I guessed everything in your friend's studio that day, and I am going to keep Stella out of harm's way. You need not be uneasy."

He kissed the hand she offered him, and they were both silent. The Princess went back to her place and Filippo took up his pencil again, but his hand had lost the steadiness necessary for his work; and the Princess's expression had changed. She thought of Filippo and his prospects, she told herself that it would be doing him a service to relieve him of the care this girl was to him. Why should he be thus burdened, the artist on the road to fame, who had

chosen of his own free will "Aspiro, spero" as his motto. What was he to do with a lovely young woman tacked on to him, who did not know his worth, who loved another. Stella would be to him a hindrance, for she needed mental development and education more than Filippo did; but to Wilfrid she might be a blessing!

Her thoughts were thus engaged till the sitting terminated. Filippo was a riddle to himself. When he looked back on the last few days and weeks, he could not conceive how it was that he had been so near Stella and free to see her whenever he chose, and yet had availed himself so little of the opportunity. He had scarcely given her a thought, except when he was painting her or sitting with her in Peggy's room of an evening. And yet in the autumn she had been the sole object on his horizon, to possess her had been his highest aspiration. Even after the explanation between them he had loved her madly, and longed for her with all the passion that was in him.

How was it then that the thought of Wilfrid's coming visit only caused him to feel anxious for Stella, and not nearly so excited as her presence in

Adalbert's studio had made him a few weeks ago? How was it possible that his anxiety now had nothing to do with love? Was he really so changeable? Had her indifference made him indifferent too?

He still delighted in Stella's beauty; he rejoiced that she should share his present pleasant life, that she should be under a more refined influence than she had ever known before. He laughed and joked with her when they occasionally met in the evening and she, like him, stumbled over the new English phrase they had learnt by day! In time to come he would need the knowledge for his travels and intercourse with the great world, while for Stella the study of foreign languages seemed to be only a pastime. She would never do more than amuse herself with them. He knew that wherever he went he should miss her, the fair, innocent creature, who had grown up under the same roof with him, to whom he had been proud to act as guardian and proprietor; but the glowing, all-absorbing passion had burnt out. He thought of her no longer as his future wife; that was all over.

He had begun to paint again, when the clock

struck the hour and reminded him it was time to get ready for luncheon. As he put up his brushes, the words "Aspiro, spero" again caught his eye, and he thanked Heaven with all his heart for guiding him to Roccaforte, and permitting him to win the favour of such an excellent man as the Prince Salvatore.

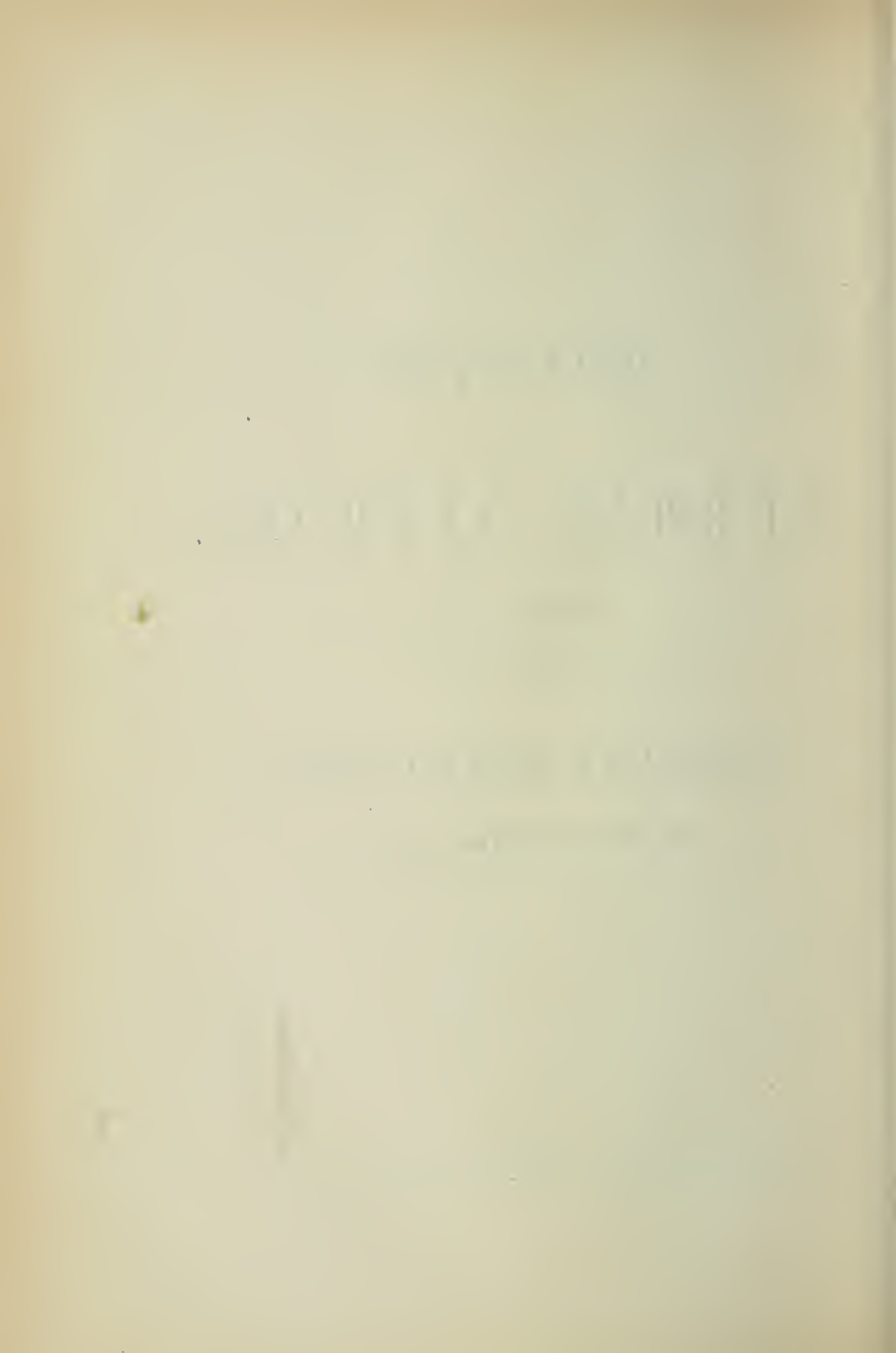
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STELLA BY FANNY LEWALD.

IN TWO VOLUMES.—VOL. II.



STELLA.

BY

FANNY LEWALD.

FROM THE GERMAN BY

BEATRICE MARSHALL.

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IN TWO VOLUMES.—VOL. II.

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S T E L L A.

CHAPTER I.

THE Prince had ridden into the wood with one of his foresters, to see about a new road that was to be made there. The Princess and Filippo sat on the terrace under the shade of the awning before the Princess's boudoir, when Peggy made her appearance with Stella.

Stella was dazzled by the Princess's brilliant beauty, which had not impressed her that day in the studio, because she had only been attired in a simple walking costume and Stella had been too much excited to notice anything. She was still more embarrassed when she saw Filippo sitting by her side, who did not rise to meet her as usual and take her by the hand with a friendly greeting, so that she dared not address him with a "Good day, Lippo!"

“Come nearer, child,” the Princess said, “and tell me how you are. Have I not kept my word? Isn’t it beautiful out here, and isn’t the Padrona, my good Peggy, very kind!”

“Yes, your Highness, very kind,” answered Stella, with a feeling of restraint she had never known before.

“Peggy is satisfied with you too,” the Princess went on, “she says you are industrious and handy; you know how to imitate the pretty convent lace which they use to ornament the altars. You shall come and teach me how to do it. I understand embroidering with gold thread on silk, and I will show you the way to do that if you like, and we will make lovely cloths for our altar worthy of the picture Signor Filippo is painting for it, and covers for the chalice and pyx, and perhaps gorgeous vestments for our future Signor chaplain!”

“Yes, your Highness, I will do my best, your Highness.” Stella murmured, and Filippo saw how anxiously she turned her eyes towards him to learn if she were behaving as she ought. His friendly encouraging smiles reassured her; her modesty and bashfulness charmed and touched him, but he saw with satisfac-

tion how much less at home she was than himself in the ways of the world, the world in which he was determined at all costs to win a position; there was already a gulf between him and Stella which must become wider and wider the higher he climbed, the nearer he got to the top of the ladder.

“You may go now, Stella,” the Princess said, “take her with you, Peggy. And remember, my child, that you take pains to learn all our customs here. Send her to me again after lunch to-morrow, Peggy. And—Stella! Bring your pillow and thread and the pattern of the lace. We will set to work to-morrow afternoon. I am engaged with Signor Filippo all the morning. If my cousin comes here soon, we must fit up another studio, for he is going to paint a picture with you in it.”

“Lady! dear lady!” cried Stella, forgetting the “Highness” with which Peggy had told her she must address her benefactress. “Ah, how kind of you, lady!” a rosy flush spread over her face and neck, and she raised her clasped hands with an ecstatic gesture as if a heavenly vision had opened before her.

The Princess’s repeated: “Take her away, Peggy!” brought her to herself. In obedience to a sign from

the old woman she followed her in silence. The Princess looked after her pleased and smiling. Filippo's face had clouded.

"It is a pity," she said, not giving him time to say anything that she would rather not hear, "it is a pity that you can't read English, and only know Shakespeare's plays by name, or by hearsay. Otherwise you would understand what has prompted my cousin's conception of Stella as Juliet, and himself as Romeo, for I hope he will be his own model for Romeo! If I am attracted by the girl's spontaneous, fresh young love who have no share in it, how irresistible it must be to him the object of it."

Filippo shook his head. "I can only regard this passion as a great misfortune," he said gravely. "Had I foreseen that Wilfrid would be coming here, Stella should have stayed where she was, and even now I cannot be sure that it is not my duty to send her back to Rome to her grandparents again."

"Send her back to Rome, and why? What will you gain by that? Her bold little friend will take her to Alberto's studio again, and to others as well, and she will not be able to resist her. No, my friend, she is safer here, and I think we may trust my cousin and

your friend's sense of honour. I have consulted the priest, who I know, spoke to you or her relations about Stella coming here and quite approved of the scheme. Fancy the poor child alone in Rome while you are employed out here. From very dulness she would go to the studios, after having once ventured to enter one, and then what she did at first for novelty would become a practice. Who knows to what that might lead? Perhaps the very thing from which you rightly consider it your duty to protect Stella; for you know, after the first step has been taken the downward path is easy."

Filippo to his vexation did not understand the Princess's last words, for she had from habit spoken French. He had no choice but to fall in with her views with regard to Stella, yet he felt extremely uneasy about her. On considering the whole affair he blamed himself alone for what had happened. It had all been well till that day when, against good prudent old Gianbattista's will, he had insisted on taking Stella out to the Vigne Verdi. What could he do now?

Charlotte and the artist were still sitting together when the Prince returned. He had sent the forester

to the nearest post-town for the Roccaforte letters, and had brought them with him. Among them were two letters from Wilfrid, one to the Princess and the other to his friend. In the letter to his cousin he informed her that he was obliged to postpone his visit and forego the shooting he had been anticipating with so much pleasure. Adalbert had received the news of his father's sudden death, and had set out for home immediately, where he would, owing to this misfortune, probably be detained for some time, his mother and young sisters now having only him to depend upon. Wilfrid at his request, had readily undertaken to wind up his Roman affairs for him, and he was tied to the town till he had seen to the packing of Adalbert's pictures, and other possessions, and could not say when he should be free.

Filippo's letter contained a more detailed account of Adalbert's trouble and a message from him, and concluded with these words: "Alas! the trio is broken up. But let us two hold to each other as long as we can, and hope for many a happy hour together before I, too, go northwards for an indefinite period, without having come anywhere near the height of my artistic ambition. I was looking forward to your

society at Roccaforte more than to the shooting which the good Prince offered me. When a man is suddenly compelled, as I am now, to come to a standstill on the road along which he has been travelling, and on which he has started without much premeditation, everything lying on either side of him bears a different aspect—perhaps it is for the best. Ever your true friend.”

There was a tone of sadness in these few lines which Filippo was not slow to discover. He was convinced Wilfrid would not come at all to Roccaforte now. The Princess was also of this opinion, and although Filippo’s mind was easier, he was grieved at the prospect of not seeing his friend again.

That evening, when Filippo sat at table with the Prince and Princess, the Prince asked him if he wanted anything brought him from Rome.

“The Princess wishes for a few little things she left behind by mistake,” he said, “and I must not forget your riding lessons. Marco shall bring out the chestnut mare that I ride myself sometimes in Rome. I am going to write to-night, and if you have orders in Rome, they shall be attended to.”

Filippo thanked him, saying, he thought he was

provided with all he wanted, and Charlotte remarked that she hoped the Prince would not send Marco away directly, but keep him some little time in the villa, where he might be employed, and give Filippo instruction in riding.

“No!” replied the Prince, “he cannot do that. I have watched Marco. He has a fair seat, but he is rash and precipitate, and thus not a good rider, but liable to come to grief on any animal. Filippo will have a better instructor in Orlando, and we have enough servants here without Marco.”

“Certainly we don’t need his services,” the Princess said smiling, “but I want you to be kind to him for the sake of our good priest.”

And she repeated what the priest had said to her at parting, and reminded the Prince at the same time how often he had said he had no friend in whom he placed so much confidence as in Matteo, and as for herself, she would never be able to thank him enough for his counsel and guidance.

The Prince avoided giving her an answer, but, turning to Filippo, asked:

“You must know him, surely, what’s your opinion of Marco?”

Filippo felt that he had no right to prejudice the Prince against the nephew of the priest whom he venerated and loved by an expression of his own personal dislike. It would be unfair to shut him out of the favours of the great and wealthy, of which he himself had every reason to know the value. Besides he knew no real evil of Marco. So he said that Gianbattista had always spoken highly of Marco, and valued his services, and that Stella's grandparents were fond of him and that he had often visited them.

"Stella was no doubt the attraction?" said the Prince.

Filippo answered in the affirmative, and as he desired to be perfectly outspoken, he added that he believed the priest wished Marco to marry, and set up an eating-house or something of that sort, and that the old people thought it would be a desirable match for Stella.

The Princess was not displeased with the suggestion, for such a marriage would be the best way out of the difficulty, if her plans with regard to Wilfrid were shipwrecked, as at present it seemed probable they would be.

"You see, my love," she said to the Prince, smil-

ing, "we have at this moment an opportunity of rendering our excellent Father a service. I know Don Matteo's dearest wish is that his nephew should get a situation in our family. There is that pretty little house you are building on the boundary for the new *métairie*. Let Marco come, and the steward shall judge what he is fit for. If he proves capable, give him the lease of this *métairie*. I will take the responsibility on my shoulders, my Salvatore, and arrange matters too, if you like."

The Prince always ready to please her, expressed himself willing to make the trial. The steward received an order to send for Marco, and a few days later he arrived with the horse.

The Prince summoned him, and told him what he was willing to do for him for Don Matteo's sake. He admonished him to conduct himself with steadiness and propriety, and Marco, quite taken by surprise at this unexpected turn for the better in his fortunes, showed himself so pleased and full of gratitude that the Prince felt more kindly disposed towards him than before.

Meanwhile, visitors came constantly to the villa,

from Rome and different houses in the neighbourhood. But the Prince would not allow these to interfere with the regular occupations of the household, for he was a lover of order and method. So Filippo continued to work at the Princess's picture in the morning, and in the afternoon the Prince sat to him for a couple of hours, and Charlotte, to relieve her husband of the ennui of this task, generally sat with him while Stella gave her lessons in lace making. When the sitting was over, Filippo rode with Orlando, and in the evenings, whether there were guests or not, the Prince nearly always sent for him. He thoroughly enjoyed the brilliant society in which he found himself on these occasions, but nevertheless loved those quiet evenings best which he spent alone with his kind and genial benefactors.

The Princess was inclined to agree with him. The naturally gifted, though untaught Filippo and Stella were a new experience to her. They were a proof of what the heritage of a prehistoric culture, combined with a sunny climate, could do for those classes of the people who had no educational advantages. The Prince had never seemed to her more truly noble and liberal than in his dealings with Filippo, since he had con-

vinced himself that he was a worthy object of his interest and kindness.

Without seeming to intend it, the Prince influenced Filippo for higher things, and lifted him more and more out of the sphere in which he had hitherto moved. He made him take wider views, gave him hints as to the books he should read, and pointed out how he could best acquire the attainments of a gentleman. As to himself, a proficient in all those accomplishments which are considered an indispensable part of a nobleman's education, he saw with satisfaction how quickly his protégé learned to manage a horse, and that the hand, long accustomed to the delicate manipulation of the brush, had not lost the power necessary to wield arms, and that the eye, so used to the continual contemplation of the beautiful, was nevertheless sure and quick in its aim. Then too, the ease with which he fell into the usages of polite society amazed him.

The Prince had always understood the pleasure of giving. But he could not have believed that to instruct, and to watch the gradual mental development of another, after having worked all his life at his own, would be a source of such keen delight to him. Daily intercourse with this ambitious, high-souled young man,

hungry for learning and knowledge, made him feel almost young again himself.

If Filippo's mind grasped clearly what had been strange to him and beyond his reach before, drew inferences from premisses which were now accessible to him for the first time, and adapted them for his purpose, Stella, in her original way, observed things and made use of them for her own especial objects.

When she saw a table laid for meals, whether it was in the princely dining-room, in the steward's house or Sister Monica's quiet cottage, she instinctively added some floral decoration of her own design. She was always devising new ornaments for herself and the steward's daughters; not a Holy Mother or a saint she ever came across, was without a fresh deftly woven wreath, or artistic nosegay, and wherever there was a lack of symmetry, or a suspicion of incongruity, she felt bound to alter it and set it right. This sense of the harmonious in colour and form, which had been born in her, had intensified and developed itself under the influence Filippo and his pictures had unconsciously worked on her; and, after a time, the Prince and Charlotte ceased to be surprised when Filippo casually stopped in his painting, and inquired of Stella what

she thought of this and whether she liked that, and Stella always made criticisms and suggestions which would never have occurred either to Charlotte or her husband, and which Filippo seldom hesitated to act upon.

The Princess did not regard Stella now, as at first, as simply a means by which she could obtain a desired end; her outward beauty, and purity and simplicity of mind had endeared her to her mistress for her own sake, as to every one else in the villa: but unlike Filippo, whose complexion became fresher and whose frame grew more robust every day, Stella's colour faded from her cheeks and the brilliant light died out of her eyes, giving place to a pensive wistful expression. She would sit motionless with her work in her lap, gazing into the distance, as if she sought or expected something, then a sad sweet smile would break on her lips, and she murmured the words softly that were always in her heart and that no ear ever heard.

CHAPTER II.

MARCO had been in the villa ten days. According to his wont he was full of enthusiasm and zeal for all that was new to him, and, as in Rome, was here, there and everywhere at once. Stella he did not see often, as she was always under Peggy's wing, or engaged with the Princess and Filippo. Once he had met her in one of the terrace walks leading from the villa to the summer house, with the old Englishwoman at her heels, when he had delivered messages from her grandparents and his uncle, the priest, who had instructed him to tell her that he was glad to hear that the Princess was satisfied with her, and did not repent having taken her under her protection.

At last, one evening, he found her alone. The Prince and Princess had driven to a neighbouring castle. The supper in the steward's house, of which he did not partake, was just over, and Marco had taken care to watch Orlando and Filippo mount and

ride out of the grounds. Then he strolled on the terrace, where he had not ventured before, as it was only used as a rule by the inhabitants of the villa. He was not disappointed in his hopes of finding Stella there.

Peggy was busy indoors, Stella sat with her embroidery under the shadow of the great oaks. He seated himself close beside her without any ceremony, but she moved away from him.

"Ah," he exclaimed laughing, "pardon, pretty Signorina! I forgot we were all Princes and Princesses here! His Highness, Prince Filippo, has a good time of it now, and you and I, too, for that matter. Yes, this is a decided improvement on the old, smoky Piazza Rusticucci quarters. But I am here, too, now, and will have my fling at playing the aristocrat; it is only fair. We all sail with the wind, you know. But how do you like it out here. Is it in your line?"

"It is like a Paradise," she said.

"After the fall," he said, mockingly, "for here no one goes about naked, and you are always in fine clothes! You have an easy time of it, I see, and plenty of eating and drinking, a little singing, a little praying, and no work. Aye, the proverb is right: If

one can earn money without working, the world's a paradise! And paradise may be all very fine. But without a sweetheart it wouldn't be to my taste. I should prefer the earth by a long way, and you to the loveliest winged cherub in heaven."

"Go away! I can't bear your old jokes. You know, by this time, I am not one of those who—"

"Who play the prude," he interrupted. "No, upon my word! You certainly are not too demure, at least with foreigners. I saw that plainly enough in the Vigne Verdi, and by your father's open grave."

Stella rose in her indignation.

"Stay!" he cried. "Stay, do you suppose I blame you for it? You are only a child crying for the moon, because you know no better, but the moon goes behind the clouds, and the child stands with empty hands looking after it.—Don't go!" he exclaimed again, as she walked to the house, "stay, not on my account though. I have something to tell you from Chiaruccia. She can't write, so I was to say that the Milordo is as bad as the rest. You are to think no more of him, for he won't come now. He's got another attraction, and Chiara knows what it is."

"He won't come?" repeated Stella, as white as a

ghost. "But they said he would, and it must be true!"

"Who? What did they say?" asked Marco, who had seized her hand, without her noticing it, because her whole soul was centered on one point.

"Her Highness, the Princess! She said he was coming here and would paint me in a large picture."

"Don't flatter yourself! He has found somebody else. A tall, fair female, whom Nilo was always painting at one time."

"Prisca? The red-haired Prisca?" cried Stella. "It is not true! Who told you?"

"Chiaruccia! How else should I know it?"

"Impossible! I don't believe it. She is fat and ugly. Not beautiful like me. How can you say it's true?"

"Well, it can't be helped. It's true enough. Fat, red ladies are evidently his taste at present. It is always the way—one day dark, the next day fair! All men are not true to their loves—like your humble servant."

She broke away from him.

"She shall prove it! Chiaruccia shall prove it, or I never will believe it."

“Look here!” said Marco, drawing a crumpled piece of paper out of his waistcoat pocket, and handing it to her.

It was a note in which Prisca arranged to visit the Englishman three days following, and the street, house and landing where his studio was situated, were all named, so that there could be no mistake about it.

Stella buried her face in her hands and wept. Marco laid his hand on her shoulder.

“Chiaruccia prophesied this,” he said. “She said you would cry and curse him and the day—”

“Curse *him!* Never, never!” broke in Stella. “Poor me! I am so unhappy, so unhappy!” Her voice trembled and her shoulders heaved with her sobs. “Won’t he really come, then?” she asked. “Lippo said the other day that Nilo was gone away, and that the Milordo would go too, and not come to the villa. But I don’t believe him; and it isn’t true, it can’t be true.”

“Believe me, Stella, he won’t come, really!” Marco said, and there was a gentler tone in his voice than she had ever heard in it before. “I only tell you this, because I promised Chiaruccia I would, and she

meant it for your good, and so do I. Listen Stella. I love you, dear, and will marry you, as the old people wish. I know they wish it, and so does your uncle and the priest, and you will like to please them, Stella."

"Leave me alone," she commanded, as he tried to take her in his arms. "Let me go, I say."

"Very well," he continued, "to-day I'll obey you and let you go. To-day you may cry and sulk to your heart's content. To-day, but not always! For I am not one of your foreigners who come here and pretend to make love to our girls, and then go and leave them in shame and tears. What I say, I mean, and when I intend to do a thing, I will do it, and nothing shall prevent me. I know what I intend now. I like this place, and I have had my eye on you since the first moment I saw you!"

"I am sorry for you, then," she scoffed in her wounded pride, and anger.

"Don't sneer at me, but pay attention to my words," he said, becoming more and more eager and earnest. "When I came from the Romagna, that time, to Rome, I wanted to leave the country and see something of the world. But my uncle wouldn't have it,

and then I went to Gianbattista. There I saw you and said to myself, if I must stay here, I'll stay and have her for my wife and be as happy as a king."

"Never!" she cried, running away from him. But with a few strides he overtook her, and gripped her in an iron grasp, making escape impossible. "You shall be my wife, and no one else shall have you, mark my words. That's why I went with your father to learn the old church work I didn't care a snap of my fingers about. That's why I stuck to the Palazzo Roccaforte, because my uncle said they would give me something there, and I thought when they do, I'll marry Stella directly! Now the Princess has taken you into her service, and the Prince is going to give me the management of his *métairie*, on which you and I can live like gentlefolks. I shall arrange matters with my uncle and with the two old people and—"

"What do I care for the priest and the grandparents or the Prince either! What does it matter to them, whom I like, and whom I don't like. Go! or let me go! I am not a baby, I have a will of my own as well as you!"

Her wrath fanned his to a flame. "If it doesn't matter to them, it matters to me. If you won't listen

to them, you shall listen to me! For as sure as I am that I love you, so sure I am that I will have you."

He caught her in his arms. She pushed him from her with all her strength.

"Shall I call out for help?"

"You may if you like. Let them find the Princess's darling, Lippo's blessed Virgin, the pious modest Stella tight and fast in Marco's arms!"

He kissed her violently on the lips, then let her go. She fled to the house at the top of her speed, but in a moment he was at her side again, and speaking in a low quick voice, as if nothing had happened, he said:

"Your love for that foreign fellow makes me as unreasonable as it does you. Be silent, I say, be silent and compose yourself. Don't let me be caught and hunted away from here! I am not a bad fellow, there is no vice in me. But—you, *you* and my love for you, drive me wild. I might"—he broke off, then went on. "I tell you again, I like this place! And now they have sent for me and brought me out here where you are, I believe—and the old couple and

Chiaruccia say so too—that they intend you for me! So take care and be a sensible girl, or, beware!”

He vanished behind some bushes in the park, into which there was a path from the terrace. Stella went into the villa.

When she reached the hall she saw the carriage slowly ascending the hill. Filippo and Orlando were behind on horseback. They rode past, saluting the Prince and Princess, to the villa stables.

Stella stood still and watched them thoughtfully.

“Yes,” she said drooping her head, “they are all happy. They don’t mind. But I! I wish I were dead like my poor father, I am tired of this world and don’t want to have anything more to do with the people in it! How could he forget me? *He?*”—she slipped away to her room to have her cry out and to hide her grief from the others.

She was gentle and subdued when Peggy called her to make her tea. Filippo did not come now of an evening to take his English lesson; for Peggy was no longer his teacher but the Princess herself, and thus Stella was left far behind, for there was no need for her to learn a foreign language, and she was not ambitious to extend her knowledge; what did she

want to know English for except to speak it to the Milordo and he was not coming now and did not love her?

She didn't hear one word of Peggy's chatter. She made the tea and handed it to the old woman, but her thoughts were far away. She would like to leave the villa, for an inexpressible dread hung over her. If she could only get away from Marco, back to Rome, to *him!* She had no one whose advice and assistance she could ask. Her grandparents, Filippo, the priest and the Princess, would all say she had better stay at Roccaforte; and if she went away, if she dared to make the journey alone, to whom should she go?—To the old people? No, they would send for Marco, and let him have her! To him who had raised her from her father's grave, to whom she had given her heart the first day she had seen him, and before whom she felt she could throw herself on her knees, as before the picture of the Saviour, and beg for aid and deliverance? But he had forgotten her: should she speak to Filippo? No, now she knew what disappointed love was, and she shrank from recalling to the man the torture, which she had once inflicted, which she now suffered so acutely herself.

She passed a sleepless night and wetted her pillow with tears. Her cheeks were pale and her eyes heavy the next morning. She felt cold even in the warm sunshine as she crossed the terrace to go to the spring in the wood where she always fetched water for Peggy, as it was the purest in the neighbourhood. In spite of the early hour, she found Filippo there at work. She was not glad to come upon him just then, but he was pleased to see her.

“Good morning, good morning! And stand still, please, just as you are, only for a few minutes!—That is a good effect!” he called out to her.

She was accustomed to such requests from him, and stood patiently while he swiftly dashed his sketch on to the paper and then took up his brush, to reproduce the effect of the sunlight playing on Stella’s face through the oak-leaves.

“One has to be early with a vengeance to be before the sun,” he said, “I wanted to paint the sky at sunrise this morning, but I am too late, as his golden rays glint through the boughs already. But that is wondrously beautiful too!—Stand a few minutes longer!—You are an unexpected part of the bargain!—There

we are! And now good morning and give me your hand!"

She obeyed mechanically. He was shocked at her appearance. "Your hand is like ice and I never saw you so pale. What is the matter with you?" he asked, throwing down his sketchbook and brushes. "Are you ill, my Stella! tell me what ails you?" he urged, pressing her close to him to warm her.

She shook her head, then laid it wearily on his breast. And again he demanded with a concerned and anxious face,

"Speak child, tell me what has happened, dear Stella, are you ill?"

"Lippo, is it true that he won't come?" she asked, not able to articulate anything but that one thought which pressed upon her soul so heavily.

The tone in which she put the question, cut him to the heart, for the despair of her young love was in it, but this was not the time to comfort her with false hopes.

"Yes, I believe he is not coming now, he will go straight home. But sit down here by me in the sun there and get warm, and give me your hand. You

must calm yourself, my Stella. We can't always have what we wish, what we love most."

He noticed that she scarcely heard him.

"You know," he said, "I loved you and wished you to be my own little wife. But you refused—then I was determined to forget it, and said to myself, she shall be my sister as before and I her true brother!"

"Oh thank you, thank you, my Lippo!" she cried and squeezed his hand. "You are so kind, so good to me!"

He was pleased that he had got an answer.

"You must try to do the same," he said. "Try and forget, as I was obliged to do. I know Wilfrid loves you. He is of course as sad as you are. But he is a high-born gentleman, and you are only one of our people! And if he could forget the difference between you, because of his love for you, he would not be able to marry you—"

"I know!" she broke in, "the priest told me, he is a heretic!—But—"

"But?" repeated Filippo, feeling bitterly for this innocent creature in her sorrow.

"I can't help it! I love him so," she exclaimed, and flung herself into his arms. He stroked her cheek

and hair tenderly, murmured over her words of comfort, told her this love wound which bled so sorely now would heal, that she must unburden her whole heart to him, and be oftener with him than she had been lately, that she should talk of Milordo as much as she pleased, and in return she must listen to him when he told her about himself and his doings. Then he told her how industriously he had been studying at Roccaforte, how he intended next winter in Rome to have masters, and go to lectures, and read all the new books, as the great people did, and, if she liked, she should be better educated too, he would see to it.

At first he had spoken cheerfully, to distract her thoughts from herself, as we prattle to a sick child about any thing that comes into our head to amuse and interest it. She had listened half dreamily; but at his last words she roused herself.

“Lippo,” she exclaimed, “if I learn things that they, the gentlefolks, know, and if he comes to Rome again,—I am sure he will come back some day—do you think, that he would love me better than he does now, do you think that he would be converted?”

What he had seen of the depth and intensity

of her love, told him that, for the present at least, no reasoning would be of any avail. This was an outlet, and, at any costs, he must save her from a depression the results of which might be fatal, so with quick decision he said,

“Yes, of course; I am sure he will, if you are still beautiful!—but if you cry your eyes sore, and get thin and pale and wasted, and don’t laugh, and smile your own sweet smiles any more—how can he love you then? No man loves melancholy, washed-out girls!”

“Oh!” she cried, and her eyes brightened, “if you say that and he really will come back, it is all right. Look, I am not going to cry any more! I will learn all I can. Sister Monica can teach me. She knows about foreign countries and lots of things. And—Lippo! he—he is not gone yet, and it is still six months to the winter! And—perhaps he will come at the last to say good-bye to the Princess, his cousin—and to you—and me!”

She lifted her jug from the ground and put her hand in his arm, and Filippo had not the heart to dash her hopes, and to throw her back into that state of dull despair in which he had found her.

As they came out of the wood on to the smooth turf, they saw Marco riding across the valley to the *métairie*. Stella frowned at the sight of him, and Filippo asked the reason.

“If *he* were only not here! Why can't he go away again?”

Filippo replied that, as far as he knew, there was no chance of his going. The Prince, as yet, was perfectly satisfied with Marco, and they talked of installing him in the *métairie* altogether, for the priest's sake.

“So he told me yesterday, but I didn't believe it,” she said; “but I daresay they will do it, and if they think it right, I suppose it is—I—well, you know, I never could bear him, and if it had not been for our good priest, I——”

She stopped. Filippo asked what she meant.

“I have often thought,” she said, “that our poor father would never have tumbled down if Marco hadn't been there. It has always seemed to me that Marco has the same evil eye as Monsignor Cyrillo.”

Filippo looked annoyed, “Nonsense! Monsignor Cyrillo is a noble and thoroughly good man,” he said reprovingly.

“Perhaps he is! But the children he nods to, get sick, and the horses shy when he’s in a carriage, so that no one dare drive with him! People do not say the same things about Marco, because of the priest, but I have never trusted him. Father used to climb much higher and all alone, and he never slipped before. I was frightened at Marco the first time I saw him, and now I am still more afraid of him.”

“Then keep out of his way! You need have nothing to do with him.”

“No, indeed, nothing!” she assured him, and would have told him what had passed between them the day before, only her heart failed her. She felt as if she could not allow those terrible, threatening, passionately spoken words of his to pass her lips.

CHAPTER III.

THIS confidential conversation with her foster-brother had done Stella good, and made her feel sure that he was still full of fond affection for her. She had a new hope now, under the influence of which, like a child, she grew quickly happy and bright again. It was characteristic of her nature that her mood must be either happy or sad. She knew no alternative between joy and sorrow. When she followed the Princess that afternoon to the studio, carrying materials for lace-making and embroidery, she was again the beautiful, radiant being whom it was a pleasure to look upon, whose passing greeting was as exhilarating as a sea-breeze.

Both pictures, the Prince's as well as Charlotte's, were progressing satisfactorily. Filippo hoped to complete the Prince's head in a few days, and then he would be able to give him a holiday from his sittings. The Prince had on this account, at Filippo's request,

arrayed himself in his orders and heavy gold chain, because the artist wished to get the colouring of these decorations and the ribbon worn round the neck, to which the orders were attached, in harmony with the whole, and to do justice to them, without marring the effect of the more sombre tints of the head and background.

Silence had reigned for some little time in the studio. Filippo was quite absorbed in his work, the Princess was arranging the first piece of lace she had made, according to Stella's directions, between two strips of old gold silk, and Stella worked, without looking up, at the fine canvas on which the needlework and embroidery patterns were afterwards to be fixed. The Prince's earnest gaze was bent first on Filippo, then on the busily employed women. At last he said with a smile, "It is refreshing to see how infectious industry is; you, my dear, are working as if your life depended upon it, and I feel quite diligent myself, because I am the object of our painter's zeal. Standing still and looking on, I am inclined to consider in the light of a laborious task, in this case."

The Princess and Filippo laughed heartily, but Stella said quite seriously,

“Indeed, your Highness, standing model is hard enough work, even if you don’t do it for pay. I have often been ten times more tired from standing still, than from cleaning and scrubbing, and when I have watched Lippo adding stroke after stroke; it was just as much a relief when the picture was done, as if I had painted it myself.”

They all smiled at her candid confession and thus encouraged, Stella exclaimed, “Look, Highness, do you see how exactly alike their mouths are when they laugh?”

“What do you mean?” asked the Princess.

“Haven’t you noticed it before? I have often, they have both the same shaped mouths, but when they smile one can’t help seeing it.”

Charlotte looked at her husband, then at the painter, and said full of astonishment, “There is really a striking likeness! How strange that I have never remarked it till now.”

“Your Highness has, of course, looked at your husband’s face more than at Lippo’s,” said Stella, laughing with that freedom, that the high born Romans do not take amiss from their inferiors.

The Princess allowed the truth of Stella’s remark,

and asked Filippo if he had not observed the resemblance himself.

He replied that he had not a clear enough idea of his own appearance, to compare it with another's. The Prince said, that there was nothing unusual in such likenesses, although he was obliged to confess that he had noticed, when looking at his own portrait, that it resembled Filippo.

"We both enjoy the advantage of being Romans and embody to some extent the true Roman type, which still preserves its most striking features. We have only to look in our museums for a proof of this, where the busts of former generations bear a strong resemblance to some of our contemporaries. But," he continued walking to the easel and contemplating his portrait, "I think my picture will be a success! The head has character, and is well carried out; the effect of the whole is harmonious and noble. What do you think, Charlotte?"

The Princess joined enthusiastically in her husband's praise, and, turning to Stella, she asked good-temperedly, "Now, my child, how do you like the picture? Can your sharp eyes detect any defects?"

Stella stood up, looked long and earnestly at the

Prince and the picture, then said hesitatingly, "Lippo, must that ribbon round the neck be red?"

"Yes, it must; and not on any account can it be another colour," he answered merrily, "but even this offending red may be toned down into something presentable, if his Highness will allow me another half hour to do it in."

The Prince acquiesced and went back to his place. Every one set to work again in the best possible humour. The extraordinary likeness between old busts and living people was again the theme of conversation, and it was discussed at length. The Prince said that a relative of his resembled the bust of Junius Brutus in the Braccio Nuovo of the Vatican museum so closely, that many said he might have been the original. Filippo knew of several other such instances, and talking thus the time passed pleasantly and quickly, and the sitting did not terminate till some expected guests were announced, who had been asked to stay a few days, and in honour of whom two or three families in the neighbourhood had been invited to dine that evening at the villa.

The party was a convivial one, and it was not till late that it broke up, and the guests repaired to the

rooms destined for them. At midnight the Prince went to his wife's apartment, the quaint old lamp with its five curved branches burned on the mantel-piece, but its light was not needed, for the whole room was flooded with the soft, bluish-green radiance of the moon. Charlotte was lying on a couch opposite the open windows. It was just the time when the orange-trees were in flower, the air was heavy with their fragrance, and as, at this elevation on the hills, there was no fear of fever, the Princess was enjoying to the utmost the delicious odour and drinking in the pure balmy air.

She had thrown a light wrapper round her, her bare arms were crossed behind her neck and supported her head. The moonlight illuminated her face, and enhanced the beauty of her splendid figure.

The Prince hastened to her side and drew her slender form close to him, and half raising herself she wound her arms round his neck.

"You are as fair as this wondrous night, my love, which overpowers us with its magic loveliness and makes us feel it a happiness merely to be alive!" he exclaimed. "Do you not rejoice in such a night and in your own beauty?"

"If you rejoice in them, of course! Could I hesitate to admire anything that you admire! and not to be in harmony with the beauty of this lovely night, would be an insult to nature."

"You are a coquette, my precious wife!"

"Then I have become so since I have known you. It is your fault!"

"As you were lying just now in the moonlight, your stately head cushioned on your beautiful arms, you looked like Ariadne. But, thank God, you are not stone!"

"And won't be forsaken as she was!" she said, gaily responding to her husband's kiss. "It must be Stella who has set us up to making comparisons and discovering likenesses! I have been examining you all this evening, and cannot understand how it was I did not see long ago, how like you were to Filippo."

"Likenesses are strange things, very strange! I remarked the first time we saw your protégé—"

"Stella?" asked the Princess.

"No! I mean your painter!" he paused. "Sometimes, but very rarely," he went on, "do we see black, lustrous eyes of such depth that they look blue in certain lights!"

“Filippo has such eyes!” the Princess interrupted.

The Prince did not reply; there was a pause which was broken by Charlotte.

“Such eyes you loved once, eyes that are black and seem blue!”

Again there was silence. A shadow fell upon these two happy people, a shadow like the cloud that slowly glided over the silver moon.

The Prince rose and closed the doors which opened into the gallery. Then he came back and took Charlotte in his arms again. She clung to him.

“Salvatore!” she said, in a pleading tone, “when we learnt to know and love each other, when you asked me to be your wife, you said to me, ‘I am so much older than you are, and a dark, long life not free from guilt lies behind me. But it lies behind me! The future shall belong to you, till my life’s end. If you desire to know my past and its secrets, I am willing to tell you all. But if your confidence in me is great enough, spare me the painful confession, and let me prove myself worthy of that confidence, by doing all in my power to make you happy.’—You have kept your word, Salvatore, in every way. Your love has made me rich in happiness.”

She stopped, not sure how she should go on, then she said: "Do you still shrink, from letting me look into the heart which has served me all these years, these years of infinite peace and bliss?"

"No, God knows, I do not shrink from it," he exclaimed. "You have a perfect right to make this request!" He drew her closer to him. "I have asked myself often whether it was not my duty to let you share those memories which at first I thought it right to keep from you, because I did not know,—*we* didn't know each other sufficiently, and because I feared it might embitter the early days of our union. Then the great light of our happiness drove them more and more into the shadowy recesses of my heart, and I had almost forgotten them, when this artist's wonderful eyes recalled them. But now, these years have taught you, that no evil apparitions belonging to that past can rise up to rebuke you or me, the history shall be yours. Will you listen to me now?"

"With my whole soul!" she murmured, throwing her arm round his neck.

He held her head on his breast caressing it tenderly, and drawing a deep breath, he began, "It

was after my father's death that I took my sister to Lucca. The place was full of foreigners, among them a great many French, mostly Bonapartist families. They imported their Parisian manner of life into the Italian town. There was much gambling, the women lived luxurious, idle lives, and spent their nights in dancing. Lamentations for the Emperor banished to Elba, were on these people's lips; the riches which had been amassed during his supremacy in Europe, were in their grasp. These fortunes were recklessly squandered in the wildest dissipation. Whoever wanted quiet, as we did in our grief, was forced to resort to some of the less frequented and small places at a little distance from the town.

We took a villa, close to the forest. A young Frenchwoman had settled in the Casino, which belonged to it, she like us was in mourning, and living in the utmost retirement and solitude. She was, we were told, the widow of a General who was killed in the battle of Leipzig, a Spaniard by birth, and scarcely over twenty.

Agatha had met her once on one of her morning walks, and was full of her praises. I made her acquaintance a few days later. Her distinguished and

beautiful appearance, and her gentle modesty, attracted me; both mourning, both of retiring dispositions, a friendship sprang up between the two women. As I devoted myself altogether to my sister it was natural that I should also become Josephine's companion and protector, and that we soon began to look upon her as belonging to us. She and I were free, and we were both young.

At sixteen years of age she had been sacrificed on the Napoleonic altar. The Emperor was fond of giving the daughters of the high and wealthy nobility of the countries he conquered, in marriage to his Generals, most of whom had risen from the lowest rank, and on whom he bestowed with lavish generosity the titles of Count and Prince. This was Josephine's fate; she was an orphan, and her guardian had reasons for being only too willing to submit to the Emperor's will. She was united to General Carmontrant, who was a brave soldier, and a newly created Count. At the time of the revolution he had left the plough for the army. He was a man of harsh and rough character, and strong passions. The world had taught him to look on wild dissipation and luxurious habits as indispensable, without having refined him or cultivated his mind.

He was extravagant like his companions, and abandoned himself to coarse pleasures.

For six years Josephine lived with him, no children were given her to console her. She was utterly miserable. The news of his death was a shock, but nothing more. She was alone in the world, nothing but the wreck of her large fortune remained to her, so that she could hardly live in the humblest way. It was this that determined her to retire to the solitude in the neighbourhood of Lucca, for the southern climate suited her, and she dreaded returning to her native place. She was quite alone, without maid or companion. The landlady of the villa who lived in the Casino, boarded her and gave her attendance.

In a few weeks we were deeply in love with each other. Agatha, who had an adoration for Josephine, was delighted, and did all she could to bring us together at every opportunity. There was no obstacle in our way. We were both of good family, and suited to each other in age. I had only to wait till the year of mourning should be over. The prospect of a future with my beloved at my side, inspired me to be energetic in the settlement of my money affairs. I took all the necessary precautions, and, at the same time, sent to Paris

for documents which Josephine would require for a second marriage, and made inquiries about the little that remained of her fortune. We counted the days to our wedding.

Then suddenly there arrived from Paris, not the expected papers, but a letter from the General, for Josephine. He was not dead. Josephine's husband still lived, and the bright castle in the air we had built up, fell in ruins on the receipt of this news.

His companions had seen him fall, at Leipzig, as they thought, mortally wounded. Cossacks had plundered him, and stripped him, and he was carried with the Russian transports, further and further east, and finally landed in Siberia. His gigantic physical strength had not given way under all these hardships and so much wretchedness. He had found an opportunity of sending a letter with an enclosure for his wife to France, but the government to which it was addressed was overthrown, and the letter was several months old when it reached its destination, and steps were taken to deliver to the Countess her share in it. Now the peace would set him at liberty. It was easy to foresee that, directly he received the order of discharge, he would set out for France. But how was the pecuniary aid Josephine

desired to send him, to reach him? He must have left the place of his imprisonment, and it was impossible to know by which route the prisoners would be taken to the frontier. Our first thought was to help the unhappy man; I found a way of doing so, through an acquaintance in Rome, who was then returning to Paris with the Bourbons, with whom he had been in exile. But when the General was free? When he did come back, what then?

“Josephine had no hope but a convent and the veil; but my love gave me courage. The picture that I had formed for myself of the General, made me think it possible that a bribe would buy his consent to a separation from his wife, for I never had any faith in a gambler’s sense of honour. I felt sure that the Pope would not refuse to grant a second marriage to a woman, who had been driven into her first nuptials by Napoleon, against her will. I comforted myself and my beloved with the hope that after a hard struggle we should win, and told her that I was sure of our union in the end. But a meeting between the General and his wife must be strenuously avoided, and for this reason we were bound to separate for the present, so

that he should have no clue to Josephine's whereabouts.

"Agatha and I returned to Anciesella. Josephine left the Casino a few days later and went by a circuitous road to a quiet town in the Riviera, where she had staid a night on her journey to Lucca in a small hotel.

"We had parted in May. Our correspondence was kept up industriously, under assumed names. I had arranged that directly the General was seen in Paris, I should be informed of his arrival, when I had resolved to go there at once and seek an interview with him. Meanwhile—"

The Prince stopped suddenly. Charlotte looked up at him with an earnest questioning glance. He kissed her forehead, and, with a visible effort at self-control, he continued, "women judge their sex with severity in such cases, and perhaps it is right, but do not think hardly of Josephine for this; she was pure and chaste as you are." Once more he broke down, then went on, speaking hurriedly.

"We had lost all power of reflection in the agony of that parting. Josephine wrote to me, that she would soon be a mother!"

“Ah! poor thing!” exclaimed Charlotte involuntarily.

The Prince was too much overcome with the memories that rushed upon him to notice her exclamation. “There was now only one thing to be done,” he said. “Her child, my child, must first see the light in the home of my ancestors, it must be in my arms the moment it breathed.

“In my dire necessity I appealed to Don Matteo. I dared not hurry to her myself and thus betray her future residence, Matteo let himself be persuaded to go and bring her to me. He was full of compassion for her state.

“It was the beginning of autumn when he arrived with her at Anciesella. Our feelings were strangely mingled ones of joy and sorrow. The uncertainty in which we lived grew daily a severer trial. At last we waited with ever increasing excitement for the news we expected of the General, we actually longed for it, as if for some great happiness. It is a fearful thing to be able to do nothing, but wait in suspense, when our future, and not ours alone, depends on immediate action. The post went as seldom, as it travelled slowly in those days; and to add to the intolerable anxiety of

this situation, the Prince of Chimay, on whose friendship I had thrown myself, and who had promised to keep me informed about passing events in Paris, had been appointed for that winter to a post in an embassy to the North, and would therefore be unable to give me the wished-for tidings. I almost resolved to go to Paris myself, but could not tear myself from Josephine before the birth of the child, for her health had suffered from her troubles and the severe penances, which in spite of my entreaties and even Matteo's warnings, she would, following Agatha's example, inflict on herself.

“Agatha had contrived two cloister cells side by side in a distant wing of the castle, for herself and her friend. Josephine had never left the house since she had come into it that autumn night with Matteo. Her fastings, and self-sacrifice, were daily a source of fresh pain to me. Her bitter remorse for the happiness she had granted me, wounded my love. I earnestly desired the General's return and my meeting with him: he himself could not have longed for his freedom as much as I did.

“Then, one night towards the end of February, the dogs in the castle-yard suddenly began to bark

furiously. The silence of the night was broken by the sound of a postillion's horn, and admission was demanded at the castle gates. The General was there. The person whom Chimay had entrusted to tell me of the General's return, had attracted attention by his inquiries, and the General insisted on an explanation. He learned that his wife had been in Lucca, and accordingly proceeded thence, where he heard enough for him to draw his own conclusions. He came that night to claim his wife. It was not long before words were replaced with arms. The General's bullet struck me in the chest, and I sank to the ground. The sound of carriage wheels, and the disturbance in the generally quiet and deserted castle courtyard, had alarmed the two women. In defiance of Matteo's entreaties and efforts to keep them back they rushed to the spot. My last conscious vision was Josephine kneeling by me, her arms round me, then the General seizing her roughly to carry her off. When I recovered from my swoon, all was over."

He paused. Charlotte was too deeply moved to speak. The Prince had turned away from her and sat with his head supported on his hand. Without, the moon again shone in all its brilliant splendour as it serenely sailed across the heavens.

“You never saw her again?” asked Charlotte at last.

The Prince shook his head sadly. “No! and I never heard the story of her end.”

“How was that?”

“I lay for two months between life and death. Thirty years ago there was no such thing as medical advice to be got in Anciesella. The apothecary staunched my wound and bandaged it as well as he was able, till the doctor from Falcetto was sent for, who did not know much more than he did. It was to an extremely clever surgeon from Bologna that I owed my recovery. For many days I was unconscious. The last order I was able to give after I had been shot, was that the General should be immediately pursued, which with passports would have been possible. But Agatha, believing me to be dying, had besought the chaplain not to leave her, and to be present to administer the last rites of the church. He had complied, acting on the belief that an attempt to rescue the wife from her husband with violence would be futile and only give an unnecessary publicity to the affair, when I might at any time, if contrary to all expectations life were spared me, learn the General’s

whereabouts, and, possibly, news of Josephine through herself.

But Matteo could not foresee the events of the next few weeks. As soon as I was capable of thinking and acting, the aspect of affairs in France was again completely changed. Napoleon had escaped in those last days of February from Elba, and had reached Paris by the middle of March. Louis XVIII. was hurled from his throne, and his followers and supporters were forced to leave Paris. Signor Saressa, with whom I had communicated there after the departure of the Prince of Chimay, had followed the court. The Bonapartist generals rallied round their Emperor, and the newly organized armies marched to the frontier.

When I was well enough to bear a journey I tried by every means to find out the route they had taken. I traced them to the neighbourhood of Rome, and at some of the roadside inns people recollected having seen a French officer accompanied by an invalid wife. But this was all I could glean, so I went forthwith to Paris. The General's regiment had been disbanded. I heard that soon after his arrival in France, which he had reached by water, he had ar-

nounced, to his friends living in Paris, the death of his wife, which had taken place on the journey to Rome. I wrote to him, and that I might be sure that the letters would reach him, I addressed them to the minister of war. They remained unanswered. I applied to people in Paris whom Josephine had known there, and to the relations in Spain she had mentioned to me. I received the same answer from all of them. They had only heard the bare announcement of her death. I took steps to discover the church-yard in which she was buried and the day on which she died, for I could not get rid of the idea that the unfortunate girl had been the victim of a deed of violence after the General had discovered her condition. The French authorities courteously and politely offered me their assistance, but the troops were on the move, and at any moment a pitched battle might be fought—thus days and weeks passed. Who had time to inquire into the fate of one single woman, or to concern themselves about the torments and misery of a foreigner? At last, after months of waiting and hoping, the news of the battle of Waterloo and the captivity of Napoleon convulsed Europe. The General met his death in that great battle; so it was now useless to continue the prosecution of my in-

quiries. If the English government had failed, at the end of the last century in times of peace, in its attempts to find any clue to the disappearance of Lord Bathurst in Germany, how could I count on success in the midst of these contending emotions, when the whole world throbbed with the wildest political excitement, and every country was overrun with foreign armies.

After a few months I returned again to Anciesella, still clinging to the possibility of finding Josephine again, ever waiting for some sign to tell me she was alive, till I was forced to say to myself, this sign will never come now: she is dead, she and the child are lost to me for ever.

Afterwards, as you know, I lived at the castle till my sister's death, who led a life given up to ascetic and devotional exercises, and even after she was gone, I scarcely left it at all for a very long time. When I returned from my travels and mixed in society once more, I was still only resigned, and had given up all thoughts of a bright future. Then you came into my life, renewed my youth, and brought me new happiness—God bless you for it. He knows how full my heart is of love and gratitude to you."

He clasped her in a tender embrace. As he kissed her eyes, he felt they were wet with tears.

"You are crying!" he exclaimed, alarmed. "I have spoken too unreservedly, it has been too much for you."

"No, no! I thank you for telling me all. With all my heart I thank you! I feel now for the first time my right to call you mine."

"Then, my darling, why are you so agitated?"

Charlotte's lips trembled, and she said in a low toneless voice: "*She* would have given you children, the heir; I—

He kissed away her tears. He could not bear her to pronounce that word, the only thing wanting to his happiness.

CHAPTER IV.

WHEN the Princess came into the studio the next morning for her sitting, Filippo at once observed a change in her manner. The playful haughtiness, the luminous, quick glance that generally shot from her eyes, had given place to a subdued and thoughtful expression. No close inspection was necessary to discover this change, for Stella, who always worked in the painting room during the sittings, asked her Highness at once, whether she felt quite well.

“Certainly! I am perfectly well,” Charlotte replied quickly, then she bade the painter direct her how to place her hands, as he was going to work on them that morning. He gave her the fan he wished her to hold in her right hand, and told her to turn the lace ruffles further back on the sleeves, so that the shape of her beautiful wrist was not lost, and after arranging the velvet folds to his satisfaction he began his work. But she did not greet him in her friendly,

winning manner, as she had never failed to do before, neither did she smile upon Stella this morning.

The sitting ended, and the Prince came to fetch his wife. Filippo thought that he too looked strangely grave and abstracted, and at luncheon there was a constraint on the little party, and no one talked with the usual ease and freedom. The Prince and Charlotte both purposely made conversation, which often dragged or collapsed altogether, and then was hastily resumed, so that Filippo felt sure something had happened to sadden these two, to whom he had become devotedly attached, and their unknown trouble oppressed him also, and made him silent.

The Prince suspected what was passing in Charlotte's mind, and, ever full of affectionate consideration for her, he wished to dispel these gloomy and painful reflections before they took deeper root. So, when they found themselves alone, he said:

“I yielded to your wishes yesterday, my love, and do not regret that I did so, although I am more convinced than ever of the wisdom of the Bible precept: ‘Let the dead rest, but forget them not.’ If once we speak of them, they are among us again, taking part in our affairs as of old, and it is not always

that there is room for the dead among the living. All those years in which I never spoke to you of Josephine, I had not forgotten her or our love or our guilt, but—”

They stood on the balcony in front of the dining-room windows. He put his arm lightly round her waist, having paused intentionally in the middle of his sentence, to avoid a return to last night's conversation.

“Look round you, my dearest wife! Everywhere the operations of nature's law allow the present its right over the past, however much it may owe to that past out of which it has grown, and without which it could not be what it is. What I am,” he paused again, “what I am, Charlotte, to you, the conscientious, stern man, hard upon himself, whom you have learnt to love and to make happy, I have become on the soil of that unhappy past; and those remembrances must necessarily be exceedingly painful for us to go over together. You know all now, so we will not refer to the matter again. Only one thing I would have you bear in mind: I am convinced that Josephine's noble soul, if she is watching us now from above, does not grudge me my happiness in you, after

nearly a lifetime's solitude. She was capable of any sacrifice. You show yourself not less noble than she! Grant her the joy of knowing that I remember I loved her, that her memory is sacred to me."

"Indeed, indeed I will," she exclaimed, "and as God is above us and hears me, you shall not have appealed to me thus in vain! I shall bless the hour when I can prove to you that I value you and your happiness, as she did, more highly than my own."

She lifted her lovely eyes, dim with a mist of tears, to his, full of tenderness and love. He embraced her gently and said, "I believe you, I am sure of it! Let us hope that we shall never be driven to any severe test of our love. And now we will drop a veil over the past. Let it be buried and at rest as before."

Neither of them said any more. Josephine's name was not mentioned again, but Charlotte could not help thinking of her. She became depressed and lifeless. She did not know why. She watched herself and watched the Prince, in a way she had never thought of doing before. When she caught herself doing so, she would say half aloud: What has happened? Why are things so different between him and me?

Before she had become intimate with the Prince,

rumours of this love adventure had reached her ears in society, and, instead of repelling her, they had made him seem all the more attractive.

The Prince had himself suggested to the priest that he should break to her the fact of his having once loved a married woman whom he believed, and who believed herself to be, a widow, and of whose death he had been the innocent cause. The priest had obeyed, and Charlotte had not made this past history of her husband's an obstacle, neither had it caused her a moment's sadness during her happy married life. But now that she had heard the name of the ill-fated woman, and the story of her love and sufferings, from her husband's own lips, she stood between him and her like someone living. Charlotte was jealous of the passion which the Prince had cherished for Josephine, of the long time he had mourned her loss. Then she felt as if she ought to do penance for the Prince, and say masses for the unfortunate lady so long dead, as Princess Agatha had done. But the idea most prominent in her mind was, that her childlessness was a judgment on the princely family which threatened to die out with Prince Salvatore.

The house over which till now she had been so proud and happy to reign as mistress, seemed to her suddenly empty and deserted, because she was sure her husband missed the heir there, and lamented that it must fall into strange hands. She believed she should positively hate to enter the castle of Anciesella again, and yet her thoughts were continually occupied with it.

Every corner of the old place would in future remind her of Josephine, and her last terrible departure from its gates. She wished she knew which apartments the Countess had inhabited, in which room the combat had taken place, and yet she told herself there would be something dreadful and horrible in this knowledge. Then she reproached herself bitterly for her present state of mind, and, dissatisfied with everything, she was seized with a lively desire for the presence of her true adviser and friend, her good Father Confessor. She would have given anything to be able to pour out her heart, without breaking her promise to her husband, to him, on whose holy sympathy and silence she could rely, to whom she might speak of a trouble which would not let her rest. She longed for his advice, that by prayers and fasting

she might restore her calmness, and never before had she had more reason to bless her conversion to the Church of Rome than now when her heart was torn with contending emotions. Confession was a consolation to the tired, storm-tossed soul, and new works of charity an atonement for the sins of the past as well as a distraction from self. But she dared not immediately desire her Father Confessor to be summoned, for she did not wish the Prince to suspect that she so sorely needed him; and yet he saw she was not her gay bright self, and Filippo too remarked that the clouds which had gathered on the Roccaforte firmament did not disperse, and leave the sky clear and bright as before.

He thought it over, and was troubled that he could not solve the problem. He became conscious for the first time that his regard for this noble pair, so infinitely far removed from him in position, was deeper than, and of a different character from, his sentiments towards Gianbattista, with whom he had lived for so many years in such close relations, to whom he had been indebted for so much, whose kindness as soon as he was able, it had always been a pleasure to him to

return, whose old age he had considered it his most sacred duty to tend and care for.

It had been so easy to satisfy the honest old man. All his thoughts and wishes had been concentrated on his daily bread and his daily tasks. He had been pleased with little things, nor did it take much to make him irritable. A bottle of good wine, an ounce of superior tobacco, some droll studio stories or town gossip were sufficient to smooth the furrows from the old brow and drive away dull care. The narrow horizon brightened quickly after every domestic thunderstorm, and an hour afterwards everything went on the same as usual. Filippo had seen the family relations clearly, in fact had known them by heart, and never had worried himself much about them.

It was different here. There had been no perceptible hitch in the chain of affairs. Things went their ordinary course peaceably enough. But when in the morning the Princess stood before Filippo at his easel, and in the afternoon the Prince took her place, he wondered whether he should keep the expression in the two faces as it had been, or change it to the very different one they now presented.

As an artist these two striking personalities had grown on him. His noble patron and patroness had found their way into his heart, for their moral goodness as well as their physical beauty. He was reverentially attached to them, he felt elevated and ennobled through his associations with them, they made him forget that he was a stranger, a mere labourer in their hire, and that after a few weeks or months were over he must part from them, and perhaps for ever.

It pained him when the Prince looked graver than usual at the sittings, when his mouth was sternly and resolutely closed, and he had no friendly, encouraging words for him. It was a real vexation to him to see the Princess, heavy-eyed and abstracted, her mind evidently occupied with more serious considerations than her portrait, of which, hitherto, every line and shadow had been a matter of lively interest. He could not cheer her as he would have done good old Gianbattista. It was not his place to ask what had happened, and why she had changed her plans.

The Prince had only recently inquired when Filippo could get the two pictures done, and begged him to do so as rapidly as possible, as his favourite

hobby, agriculture, rendered his presence in the Romagna estates necessary: Stella, too, had told him that the family were going away, and that Peggy thought the Princess would take Stella to Anciesella with her if Filippo could spare her.

Now, Charlotte told Filippo there was no occasion to hurry. As the air of Anciesella had not suited her last year, they would stay in the villa for the present. The Prince had some agricultural scheme in hand here, which he had at first intended only to carry out later; an accident, however, had induced him to set it in motion at once, so that it was probable the visit to the Romagna would be abandoned altogether for this year, and they would not leave Roccaforte till they travelled to the south for sea-bathing.

Filippo saw an engineer, who had lately arrived, making measurements, and fresh relays of workmen appeared daily; tenements were quickly erected for them, and busy activity prevailed in the neighbourhood of the villa.

The Prince and the engineer were out a great deal on horseback with the steward. Marco sometimes accompanied them to carry the engineer's tools and hand them to him when he required them. The Prince found

him willing and obliging enough, and occasionally he came up to the villa at the engineer's request. One evening, when he had been to the latter's house to leave something, he discovered Filippo alone in one of the arbours. He went up to him and greeted him politely, holding his hat in his hand.

His manner surprised Filippo. When Marco had frequented Gianbattista's house, he had felt bound to keep him at a distance as much as possible to show him that, although he lived under the same roof as the old man and Stella, he would not be addressed by him with the familiar "thou," and that he decidedly objected to his off-hand freedom of manner. This had given rise to a declared hostility between them, which circumstances that followed did not ameliorate. Marco's presence at Roccaforte had not been agreeable to him on Stella's account, although the training he was now undergoing, and the vigilance of the Prince's servants, kept him under restraint, and Filippo had had occasion to remark that his general behaviour had improved.

Now, because he wished to show his appreciation of his courtesy, he rose and walked a few paces by his side, for he could not ask him to sit down. It would

be in defiance of an established custom of the house, for any of the retainers or people employed on the estates to be seated in these rustic nooks, which were intended exclusively for the family and their guests. Marco was quite satisfied to stroll on the terrace with the artist, who was now held in such high esteem, and heartily wished somebody might pass by to see him.

“Thank you, Signor Filippo, thank you,” said Marco, “for your condescension; for you are much thought of here, you have climbed quickly to the top of the tree! Yesterday I heard his Highness, the Prince, tell the engineer that you were a real genius and would one day be accounted among the great of this world. Others don’t make their way so rapidly. Well! we must all have patience.”

Filippo scarcely knew what to make of this complimentary remark, but naturally good-humoured and always pleased to hear of the Prince’s recognition of his talents, he said in an encouraging tone, “You have plenty of time before you yet. You must remember I am four or five years older than you are, you have your foot well in the stirrup here, and I suppose you like the life?”

“Like it? I should think I did,” exclaimed Marco.

“I am in my right place for the first time, and where a man has found his vocation, there he should stay! I see that even *you* understand what sort of a fellow I am, at last. Yes, as you say, I have my foot in the stirrup; and let but a horse turn up, and, as sure as my name is Marco, I will take care to tame it either by force or patience!” he laughed and went on to say he believed the Prince was satisfied with him.

Filippo said, he had heard so. He was sure the worthy priest would be delighted, and the Princess, too, for Don Matteo's sake, if Marco found a permanent situation at Roccaforte.

“Yes, I know! My uncle has often said as much, and the old people in the Piazza Rusticucci have had their say in the matter, too, it was easy enough to understand what they meant, for I can put two and three together. You may be sure I made no objection, not I! I catch the ball while it's rolling,” he said, laughing in his old self-satisfied manner. But he recollected himself quickly, and, coming closer to Filippo, continued: “You are the Signor already, I am not one yet, but I will be one day. It is as well to be clear about things. I know, what their intentions are concerning me, and why they have

got me out here! There is one 'but' however! I won't be trifled with, for I am more than in earnest. You might help me in this if you liked and put it all straight."

Filippo knew now what he was driving at; and, as he did not trust him, he thought it wisest not to irritate him by offering any opposition. "I don't know what your 'but' is. Tell me candidly what you want me to do," he replied.

"Very well. I know you wanted her yourself, and that she wouldn't have you, or you would have stayed there with her when the old man died. When I saw you went away to live in the Via Margutta, I would willingly have married her. But everything was in the air then, now things are different—"

"You are speaking of Stella?"

"Of whom else should I speak. You have given her up, and it is very natural! I should look for higher things, too, if I were in your place."

"My affairs are not in question. Be so good as to leave them alone."

"As you like! You understand, Filippo, I have given up my loose way of living. Every child knows, that the wine which ferments the quickest is the best

and clearest in the end. I will settle down here and get the *métairie*. But in the *métairie* I must have a wife who will bring me a hundred scudi or so. She's got that and more, and you may paint her as much as you please, when she is mine. Tell her straight out that you think she had better take me, that the Englishman in Rome means nothing, and—"

Filippo would not let him go on, at the same time he was inclined to think Marco not so bad after all, and if he really loved Stella in his own fashion he felt for him. So he said quickly:

"I am not Stella's father nor her guardian, and if I were, how could I help you? In love and marriage you must take your own numbers as in the lottery, and the price of a ticket is just yourself. Wait a little, as yet she has no mind for the game and won't have anything to say to you, but perhaps she may think better of it yet. Have patience, and when the right time comes—"

"You will be on my side?"

Filippo had been slowly turning the matter over in his mind. It was not for him to give any decisive promises, the consequence of which might be an impetuous and hasty renewal of love making on Marco's

part. Marco must prove that he really intended to pursue the road steadily, on which he was now fairly started, and refrain from courtship of Stella, at least for the present. There was still a chance of the Prince and Princess going to the Romagna, where they would take Stella with them; that time should be given her, seemed to him most essential.

Marco, perceiving Filippo's hesitation, repeated his question.

"If Stella likes you," Filippo replied, "I have nothing to do with it. Leave her to herself till you are established in the *métairie*, then try her and see how she takes your proposals. You are a strong fellow and have plenty of pluck, you only want patience too. You know, they say, fortune favours the brave."

Marco's eyes gleamed. "Yes, fortune smiles on the brave and on foundlings, too," he exclaimed, highly pleased with Filippo's answer, and wishing to return his good wishes in a friendly spirit. "You are a living example of that. Foundlings always meet with good fortune."

Filippo started, for at that moment the Prince and Charlotte stepped out into the terrace, followed by Stella, who was carrying the Princess's sunshade and

mantilla. With a hasty greeting he bowed low and disappeared with Marco; but the last loudly spoken speech of Marco's had not escaped the Prince's ear, and turning to Stella he asked: "What does that mean? Is Filippo a foundling?"

Stella looked horrified, turned her eyes anxiously first on the Prince, then on Charlotte, and laid her finger on her lips. "Hush, hush, your Highness," she implored. "He can't bear that! Poor fellow, when he was a boy and I was quite a little thing, I often noticed it. If anyone mentioned it, he would gnash his teeth, and clench his fist, and even now he feels melancholy when he thinks of it. But it is true. Everyone knows it, our dear priest too. They don't talk about it, because he doesn't like it, and is so ashamed of it. He was only a child from San Spirito, and now my father is dead he has nobody in the whole world but me, poor dear Lippo!"

She put the parasol and mantilla on the table, then, stooping to kiss Charlotte's dress, she said: "Your Highnesses won't tell him what I have said, and oh, dear lady, you won't think the less of him? He cannot help it. He is so kind and good and noble, a perfect angel!"

The Prince looked after her with a beaming smile, as she tripped lightly into the house. "What a dear child that is!" he said half aloud, then, turning to Charlotte, he added: "That explains it! That is his sore point. I see clearly now a great deal that puzzled me about him before. I wonder if Wilfrid knows?"

Charlotte could not say. "I am rather surprised," she exclaimed, "that Matteo never told us."

"Why should he? It was of not the slightest importance to us. If he knew how sensitive Filippo was on the subject it was wise of him to spare him. But he must be cured of this, it cannot be wholesome for him to cherish this painful consciousness. A woman's tact could easily do it. Tell him when you find a favourable opportunity, that we have learnt his origin to day, and as rational people have not changed our opinion of him one whit on that account.—By the way: why hasn't Wilfrid turned up yet, what prevents his paying his promised visit now?"

"I think I know."

The Prince looked at her inquiringly.

"He is deeply in love with Stella, he knows her passion for him, and as he won't and can't marry her, he avoids her; at least I believe this is the case."

“That is really most virtuous, worthy of canonization!” said the Prince laughing. “What a pity he does not belong to our Church.”

“Ah!” cried Charlotte, “how ardently I wish that he did.”

The Prince was in too good a humour to take this seriously.

“If the fourth Henri did not consider Paris too dearly bought with a mass, I should think many another in Wilfrid’s place would go through the ceremony, with a beauty like this Stella in the scales. Well for him and well for poor Stella that Wilfrid is so strictly honourable! He is a good fellow, and it was more than praiseworthy of you to remove the girl from Rome. But I must not forget our painter!”

The Prince walked away. Charlotte knew that she did not deserve his praise in the way he had meant it, but could not make up her mind to be perfectly open with him, for curiously enough she was in dread of incurring the Prince’s blame, which before she had never feared, in spite of the vast difference in their ages and a consciousness of his mental superiority. “Would Josephine have told him and asked his pardon; would she have been capable of forming such a plan,

and keeping it secret as I have done? Would Salvatore have blamed her, and if so would she have taken it meekly? Again the unhappy woman's name and memory became a source of the liveliest pain to her as she asked herself these questions.

CHAPTER V.

With the Prince's resolution to pass the summer at Roccaforte a regular daily routine set in at the villa.

One day was very much like another, but Stella and Filippo did not find this monotonous, for they felt the longer such pleasant days lasted, the better. The great landed nobility, who had frequented the house so much at first, had long since retired to their more distant country seats, so guests were rarer than before. The engineer had left the villa, having completed the plans and designs. The Prince superintended the workmen in person. Filippo, who, by this time, was a fair horseman, often accompanied him, and when Marco was of the party, Filippo was obliged to confess that there was nothing to complain of in his conduct towards himself.

A few finishing touches only were wanted to complete the portraits. Filippo, with his patron's approval,

had put them aside for a while, for now that time was not of so much importance, he wished to come to them again with an eye rested and refreshed. At present he was devoting himself to his principal task—the altar-piece for the Princess's chapel. He had found the figures he wanted in the steward's married daughter and her children, and in the old steward himself, and as he held out a hope to the Princess that the picture would be finished by the end of the year, so that the chapel in the full splendour of its decorative beauty would be ready on her wedding day, she kept herself and Stella busily employed with the embroideries and lace work, so as not to be behindhand with these important matters.

It was as quiet and peaceful a life as any one could wish to lead: the Prince and Filippo enjoyed it to the full. Only the Princess often tortured herself with thoughts of that past of which she had vowed she would not speak again, and Stella's eyes gazed constantly in the direction of Rome, because she never gave up hoping that he for whom she yearned, still lingered there and would come at last, if only for a day, for an hour, or for one long look. Her love, like all great loves, thought it could be easily satisfied.

In Rome everything was almost as quiet and peaceful as it was at the villa. The city had begun to sink into her deep summer-sleep. The old reign too had closed its eyes. The pope was dead, his entombment was over, and of the ambitious aims and schemes which were slowly being worked out or frustrated in the silenced chambers of the Conclave in the Quirinal, nothing was to be heard in the town. The shutters of the palaces were closed, the shopkeepers had taken their best wares out of the windows, and the streets were almost completely deserted, except in the early morning and late evening hours.

The foreigners had all fled soon after Easter and the artists had broken up when the so-called "German carnival" was over, and the masquerades which in those days were still given by the artists, at the quarries of Cervaro, attended by every kind of merriment. Northwards and southwards old coaches piled up sky high, with quaint drivers to match them, lumbered slowly out through the gates of the eternal city, and you might often see on the roofs of these old carriages, topping the tower of strange heterogeneous packages, an artist's huge sun umbrella, camp-stool and easel.

Adalbert's pictures and properties were by this

time far on the road to Civita Vecchia, from thence to travel by sea to Cologne, but Wilfrid was still in Rome. One by one the last of his coffee-house and restaurant acquaintances, who had remained behind till now, took leave of him for the hills, the sea-side, the islands, or their native country; for summer was near, and the still air already oppressive and hot. But there was nothing to draw him away, and Rome had never spoken to him so impressively and eloquently as now in her unbroken silence.

When he went through the streets in that part of the town which generally swarmed and buzzed with people of all nationalities, he began to remark every detail of the houses and innumerable chapels and long mysterious cloister-walls, which before he had hurried past too deep in conversation to heed, and it seemed as if he had never really known them before. When he stood or sat in the cool, "dim religious light" of the churches, or found himself alone in the solemn reposeful atmosphere of the lofty museums, he felt that never in all these years, in which he had so constantly visited them, had the sublime in the pictures and statues appealed to him as now when they were there for him only. The vast

extent of the ancient buildings, the bold rhythm of their arches and façades, the mighty ruins, out of the crevices and cracks of which grew long trails of ivy with blooming wild pinks and tall wall-flowers, were all his; no eyes but his feasted on them now! The drowsy rapture which we feel in dreams, but of which awakening robs us, came over him as he lay meditating among the bushes and beneath the trees that make a wilderness of the hills with their luxuriant growth, and which tower above the ruins of the Imperial Palaces; while the countless birds, confident of their safety, sang close to his ear, and swung themselves on the branches above him in an ecstasy of love and bliss.

All his life long Wilfrid had heard of the delight of sympathetic enjoyment. He had believed that happiness shared with others, is doubled, nay that it is the only true and unalloyed happiness; but now the conviction seized him that only in solitude could he gain genuine repose, and appreciate with his whole soul the sublimely beautiful in nature and art.

All this time he worked with ardour and industry. He was bent upon finishing every picture he had begun in Rome. His models, Chiaruccia, Prisca, lanky

Lorenzo and small Anselmo, were at liberty now from morning till night. The hoary apothecary with the long sharp nose, and his brother the sacristan of S. Andrea delle Fratte, and jovial Padre Crisostomo from the Cappuccini, had nothing better to do than let themselves be fêted with red Genzano wine in Wilfrid's cool studio, and if their eyes chanced to close over it and their heads to nod, the first fly that paid them a visit made them start into wakefulness again. Wilfrid allowed them to have their siesta, why should not they slumber like the rest of Rome? He was inclined to be content with everything, and himself not least, because of his complete self-mastery!—

When he had put the last stroke to his last picture, he was quite sorry that it was finished. The same evening he went, as he had often done, through the city, over the Tiber, whose yellow meagre waters slowly flowed towards the sea, up to the Janiculum, to let his eye wander from the height over town and country, over the great and mighty past and stormy human history to which they bear testimony and of which they speak.

No one else was up there on the terrace in front of the façade of the Acqua Paola, no sound was to be

heard, but the rushing boom of the five water-falls, which come from far away, and dash into the deep dark foaming waves of the huge basin, making the air fresh and cool with their light spray.

He sat down on the edge of the basin, reviewing the whole of Rome from St. Peter's to the Coliseum. How long had he known and loved that marvellous coup d'oeil, how completely it had grown into his soul! As he gazed upon it now, this memorial of man, this grand result of more than a thousand years of his work, there came into his mind, the pictures of Raphael and Michel Angelo in which God floats above the world as Father of it all, and he felt for a moment as if he too were loosened from the earth and soaring away from it on the wings of his strange emotions. He thought of his own finiteness in the midst of infinity, and of all the questions, common to the child and the old man, for which no human wisdom has ever found an answer, and these so stirred his heart, that the present moment and eternity seemed fusing into one.

He desired nothing; longed for no one; not for the friends who were dear to him, not for his mother and his home. For a minute he was lost in an inner

repose and harmony with himself. He understood the wish of the old poet, to live alone, "The world forgetting, by the world forgot."

All, why then did his eyes wander to the heights where the white houses of Frascati gleamed in the distance? Why had the ridge of hills which, with a gentle undulation, melted into the Sabine mountains and the Rocca di Papa and Rocca Priori, still a special fascination for him?—

He dared not answer this question. He had awoke from his beatific trance. As if it were a matter of great weight to him, he looked in the direction of Castel Gandolfo, the summer residence of the Popes, and wondered, which of the ecclesiastical potentates, now assembled in conclave, would next make his entry in that old palace as head of Catholic Christianity, to enjoy his reign in that beautiful spot. He cast one more long glance on the distant prospect beyond, and then left the Acqua Paola and the Janiculum, with the memory of a grand and solemn hour ineffaceably impressed upon his soul.

As he was entering St. Peter's Square, a voice close to him, addressed him with the question, "Are you here still, Signore?"

The manly yet gentle tones were familiar to him; turning round he saw Don Matteo the priest, and offered him his hand.

“I thought by this time, you would have long ago departed for Roccaforte?” said the priest.

Wilfrid replied that till to-day business had detained him in the town, but that now all was completed satisfactorily, and there was nothing to keep him but——

“But?” inquired the priest.

“Well, nothing but Rome!” said Wilfrid.

Matteo slowly nodded his head, and the keen eyes under the slightly elevated brows were fastened on Wilfrid as he said, “That one word expresses much. The world and man are included in it.”

Wilfrid was struck with this remark. It seemed as if the priest had divined the thoughts which had so lately occupied him, but not wishing to divulge what he felt, he said lightly, “You are right, Rome exercises a fascination on us from which it is hard to extricate ourselves.”

“What you call fascination,” replied Matteo, “I should define as one of Nature’s most powerful forces, and why should one wish to extricate oneself from

such? Don't you believe there is something inspiring and elevating in the air of a place where the thoughts and feelings of millions are collected as in a focus? Just now we shall be having a splendid proof of this! When, in a few months, the news of his Holiness's decease crosses the Atlantic, and penetrates through the whole inhabited world, the most hostile elements will unite in sympathetic and anxious expectation to know whom the cardinals, under the inspiration and direction of the Holy Ghost, will select, as the guiding light of Christendom, as the representative and symbol of the Saviour, who is the law-giver, Lord and judge of us all!" He stopped suddenly and then said quickly, "Pardon, I forgot for the moment to whom I was speaking."

"I am not so narrow in my own views," answered Wilfrid, "that I cannot understand and see the wisdom of yours. I acknowledge the cosmopolitan significance of Christianity, and at Oxford I made the watchword of one of the early fathers of the Church, my own."

"May I ask what it was?"

"Those golden words of St. Augustine's. 'In necessariis unitas, in non necessariis libertas, in omnibus

caritas.' My notion was that this principle secures unity in essentials."

"Only there is the question," the priest said with a fine smile, "what do you and I regard as the essential and the non essential? But—have you news of her Highness?"

He stood still as he spoke, as if about to take leave. Wilfrid told him his conscience smote him when he thought of Roccaforte. He had put off responding to the friendly invitation to stay there till so late, that he feared he would hardly have time for the visit now, and besides his relatives might also consider it too late to receive him.

"It is never too late to repair a wrong or to perform such an agreeable penance!" said the priest laughing. "You are mistaken, however, in imagining you would not be welcome now, the Prince is not going to Anciesella before the autumn. I have heard from the Princess to-day, who informs me of this, and desires me to go out to her."

"And you will go?"

"I am sorry to say that just at present it is impossible. We have the feast of Corpus Christi before us; and although it is not absolutely necessary that I

should stay I cannot make up my mind to leave the town before—”

“Before the decision on the Pope’s election?” Wilfrid interrupted.

“You are right;” answered the priest, “but as soon as it is over and the new head of Christendom has begun his reign, I shall go to Roccaforte, as the Princess is anxious to consult me.”

His tone, as he said these last words, implied that it was as Father Confessor not as guest that the Princess most earnestly desired him to come to her. But Matteo did not dwell on this, he passed glibly on to his nephew’s prospects, and said he wished particularly to express his gratitude to the Prince and Princess for their generous conduct to Marco and to one of his penitents, little Stella; she was quite a young girl, whom Wilfrid might remember meeting at the funeral of the old church Apparatore.

He paused, evidently awaiting a reply from his companion; as this was not forthcoming, he remarked what a pleasure it was to him to hear that Filippo’s talent had exhibited itself to an extraordinary degree in the execution of the Roccaforte pictures, and

that the Prince, Donna Carlotta wrote, had struck up a real friendship with Filippo.

Wilfrid entered into this praise of his friend with warmth. They were soon deep in a conversation on ancient and modern art, which engrossed them till they found themselves near the Corso, when Wilfrid proposed that the priest should sup with him and be his guest in one of the large cafés there. Matteo gladly accepted the invitation.

Wilfrid had always known the priest to be a cultivated and large hearted man, but he enjoyed his company this evening more than he could have thought possible. It seemed only natural that Matteo should inquire about Wilfrid's lately finished pictures, and that the latter should ask him to come to his studio and look at them.

As they took leave of each other the priest said he was almost certain that, the Prince and his wife being within easy reach of Rome, would return to the city when the Papal election was concluded, as there was every prospect of its being shortly. "Our Princess," said, he "is sure to want to be present at the great church ceremonial which comes off after the Adoration of the new Pope by the

cardinals. She will doubtless desire to have a share in the first great benediction, and to be a spectator of the procession in which the Pope takes part when he goes to his Episcopal chair in the Lateran. And, if you will excuse me I think you ought to stay and witness this, unless some pressing engagement calls you away."

Wilfrid said he had himself thought of remaining; and when they parted, in spite of his passion for solitude he looked back on the last two hours' conversation with infinite satisfaction.

But Matteo was still more pleased, and walked home with his thoughts agreeably employed. He carefully reread Charlotte's letter of the morning, weighing every word in it, then folded it, and laid it aside.

It contained the news that Charlotte had learned from her husband the whole story of the love of his youth, with a confession of the change that had come over her in consequence; she also expressed her ardent desire to be able to prove to the Prince, in some practical way, that her love, and joy in self-sacrifice for his sake, would not be diminished because the ghost of the woman he once worshipped had risen from the past. The priest saw nothing in this that

could lead to an absolute and lasting disturbance to Charlotte's peace, rather it offered him a new instrument for the guidance of her life, which would make that influence easier, which he considered it his conscientious duty to exercise upon her.

The definite promises which the Princess made with regard to his nephew's future delighted him; and that same evening he sat down to pen a letter to Marco, to praise him for his good conduct, and congratulate him on having deserved and gained the Prince's favour; at the same time he did his best to excite the most ambitious hopes in his nephew's mind. For if Marco really was to be leaseholder of this considerable piece of land, on which the Prince had resolved to make the *métairie*, he might, by industry and perseverance, become a man of means, and look for a higher marriage than one with Stella. Stella could then serve that other end, which to his surprise the Princess did not mention, whereas to him personally Wilfrid's conversion seemed now more than ever important. For the worthy Matteo, in spite of his advancing years, had his ambitions, as well as every one else. He did not wish to live and die as priest of S. Maria Traspontina, and the favour which he had till now enjoyed in the Vatican,

had with the Prince's help brought him near his object. But the old reign was at an end, and new governments bring new men to the helm everywhere, especially at the Vatican, where no office is hereditary, where no personal ties or interests connect the new with the old. It was necessary therefore that Matteo should make sure of, and grapple to his soul, the favour which he had enjoyed till now, and no experienced man could doubt that zeal for conversion and its results would be highly valued under all circumstances.

On the pretext that he feared Wilfrid's sudden departure, Matteo went the following morning to his studio to look once more at his pictures before they were nailed down in their cases and sent off. He really appreciated their excellent and minute workmanship, and praised Wilfrid's insight into the characteristics of the Italian people; his judgments were fair and intelligent, and the two began again, as yesterday, to exchange opinions with some animation, till the priest suddenly turned to the picture which still stood on the easel, and which he had noticed the moment he had come in.

"Oh," he said now, as if it had just occurred to

him, "You have Stella there I see; the girl I mentioned yesterday."

Wilfrid, who deplored that he had not gone on with the picture, said he had painted the head before he had seen Stella, from a study which Filippo had given him.

The study of the head still hung with others on the wall, Matteo examined both closely and compared them.

"If I am not mistaken," he said, "this is a scene from Shakespeare's drama from which Bellini took his opera of Romeo and Juliet."

"Yes," said Wilfrid, "you are right, that is the subject." The priest looked at the picture with lively interest, then with his eyes still fixed upon it he said, "Our Creator sends creatures among us now and then, at whose gifts we cannot help marvelling. Beautiful as this child of the people is, the grace of her mind rivals that of her body. I have known her from her baptism. Her goodness is equal to her ability, and when she has poured out her innocent heart to me, I have often been struck with her directness and the natural nobleness of her way of expressing herself. Filippo as far as he has been able has influenced her,

but had she had the culture of which her fine talents are worthy, she would have been an almost perfect being, whose like you do not often see. I believe that already her stay in the Villa Roccaforte, and Donna Carlotta's interest in her, have much improved her in many ways."

He abandoned his position in front of the picture, and as Wilfrid felt bound to say something, to conceal from the priest the impression his words had made on him, he remarked that such characters as Stella's could only ripen and come to their full perfection under southern skies.

"And," interposed the priest, "under the protection and light of our Church;" then he added apologetically "Do not misunderstand me, I do not wish to wrong you and your religious institutions. But the more triste the northern nature—of which I must confess I have no experience—and the more it lacks warmth, colour and brightness, the less beauty, music and singing exist in the churches, where all that is pleasing to the eye and moving to the heart is needed to lift the people out of themselves. Donna Carlotta once at the Prince's request gave me access to the melodies of some English hymns. I could well imagine that in a

barren and unlovely edifice their effect must be not only far from elevating but in many cases positively depressing. In our country the child brings his ear for sweet sounds, his appreciation of form and colour, out of church into his daily life; and love for the beautiful and sublime creates a disgust and abhorrence for the ugly and vulgar."

"You will scarcely find an artist, so far as he is an idealist, who doesn't think with you in this respect," said Wilfrid earnestly, but not altogether at his ease.

The portrait which the priest had drawn of Stella threatened to overthrow the calmness and self-control, into which he had taken such infinite pains to drill himself. The idea that the priest, through the confessional, had obtained some knowledge of the love which Stella bore him, and that Charlotte might in the same way have betrayed to Matteo his own confidences in her, excited him to no small extent.

He had always looked on confession as an institution with grave suspicion. Now that he believed himself to have been drawn into its toils, and his secret made the property of a third person, a stranger, against his will, he was more strongly opposed to it

than ever. Nevertheless he felt a strange, unaccountable inclination at that moment to lay the whole affair before a disinterested person, and to whom would it be easier to unburden himself, than to Matteo, whose opinion of Stella was as high as his own, who was no stern bigot, but a man of experience and toleration, and of delicate perceptions?

But the thought was given up as quickly as it had occurred to him. Matteo did not say any more upon the subject; their conversation gradually came round again to the papal election, and Wilfrid was strongly tempted, by the priest's descriptions of the coming magnificent ceremonies, so dear to the heart of a painter of *genre*, to prolong his sojourn in Rome still longer. "I shall not really be neglecting any duty if I do so," he said, "and I have made an excuse, quite satisfactory to myself, for going on a little longer with this quiet life, which is a pause between my work here and my future activity at home."

Matteo encouraged him in the idea. "Yield to your inclination in this," he exclaimed, "such pauses, such holidays in life are the more precious, the more rarely we indulge in them. Besides, leisure in a case like yours is useful, it gives us an opportunity of intro-

spection, and of making our own acquaintance, so to speak, more thoroughly than ever we do that of the innumerable indifferent people whom we meet in society, and with whom we waste so much of our time."

"What do we really know of these good friends and acquaintances," replied Wilfrid, taking up the priest's train of thought, "what do we gain by our intercourse with them? Unless we are able, as you are," he added, "to read the souls of others. The frequent watching of strange destinies as they unfold themselves, must lead to a true knowledge of man, and to an acute penetrative power for divining physiognomies as well as psychological conditions, a power which one envies, but almost fears being brought in contact with."

Matteo shrugged his shoulders. "If we are not altogether heartless," he said, "we often gain a knowledge which we would rather forget if we could; and why should you wince before the insight of a soul-physician? You are not afraid," he added smiling, "to look into a mirror which perhaps has reflected the image of hundreds before yours, and shows you yourself with a faithfulness which may be more wholesome than welcome. It is made for this, it is its

calling to reflect you just as you are. But as soon as you move away, your picture disappears from its surface. No one has seen it but you two, and it will keep the secret, being neither officious nor a prattler."

He introduced his little simile half in earnest half in jest, and with a certain grace of expression which attracted Wilfrid; he then held out his delicately white but firm hand, and said good-bye.

"Good-bye for the present, I hope we shall meet again soon," said Wilfrid, whose liking for Matteo and his society was steadily on the increase.

"Then you will stay?"

"I think so."

"Then au revoir, and God bless you!" answered the priest, and shook his hand so heartily as he spoke, that Wilfrid felt ashamed of having previously suspected him, and returned the priest's shake of the hand with true English cordiality.

CHAPTER VI.

THE Princess had not forgotten her husband's suggestion, and, always accustomed to do what had to be done as quickly as possible, the first time she found herself alone with Filippo, she availed herself of the opportunity of introducing the subject.

"Do you know, Filippo," she said, going straight to the point, "I have got something to say to you, a reproach to make both on my own account and the Prince's!"

Filippo looked at her in alarm, "A reproach! I have no idea what it can be! And believe me, Highness, I shall be miserable, if I have deserved it through any error of my own?"

She was silent for some moments, then she said, "It is of making an omission that you are guilty, we have to complain of a want of confidence."

Filippo assured her he did not understand her meaning in the least.

“Surely you must guess it!” The Princess went on, “You know, the Prince and I have both the very highest opinion of you, have learnt to regard you as a congenial companion and friend since you have been here, and we shall never cease to be interested in you and your work as long as we live.”

Filippo’s suspense increased; he could not conceive what the Princess was going to communicate to him.

“Why do you keep from us the secret which Stella and Marco and other people know; that you are quite alone in the world, and not, as we took for granted, a relation of Stella’s parents? Why did you never tell us you were a foundling?”

“Highness,” gasped Filippo, turning very pale, while tears overflowed his fine dark eyes. “Highness, who told you that?”

“Don’t be afraid, Filippo, that it will make any difference in our friendship,” she cried, stretching out both her hands to him. “You could not think us so narrow-minded, so full of prejudice as that! Our esteem and appreciation of your great talents will be doubled. It seems as if God had sent you into the world endowed with this genius, in order to prove to you and us all, that He is the true Father of men, and that He

blesses those with His special love who are not born to the inheritance of earthly love. We are not so small, my dear friend, as you have thought us! Christianity is a living reality for the Prince as well as for me."

"My mistress, my good noble mistress!" Filippo cried, too agitated to say more. He had sunk on his knees, and covered the hands held out to him with his tears and kisses.

"Calm yourself, Filippo!" said she gently, "the storm is over, let it be fair and bright weather again between us!" She poured him out a glass of water, pressed him to drink it, and then said, "Now, tell me everything you know about yourself. I will listen with all my heart."

Filippo did as she requested; and the story was soon told. He related how he had been left at San Spirito, how an ill written label had informed the good sisters that he was an outcast whom no one would ever want to see again. If he had felt painfully nervous when he began, the Princess's lively interest and kind, encouraging questions made it easy to go on, and he soon felt a sense of satisfaction and content in being able to lay bare his heart before some one else besides his Father Confessor, before a woman, and "a

woman like this, whose gentle lips spoke no words of blame or reproach, whose sympathy was balm to his lifelong wound.

The Princess was happy too, and her beautiful face beamed as she looked at Filippo, for suddenly she had taken a solitary man, a noble, and good man, too, into her heart, with all the warmth of a sister's affection.

He kept nothing back, and his complete confidence was most refreshing to her. His struggles and aspirations, his noble efforts for self-culture, since he had lived with them and been the daily associate of the Prince, had all the charm and novelty of romance, with the additional advantage of being real. She liked to think that she had part and lot in it. She felt she had a claim on him, and every detail of his simple history interested her as he told it to her in simple words; his connection with his friends, his passion for Stella, which was now dead, Marco's intentions with regard to her, and the anxiety he felt about Stella's strong and persistent love for Wilfrid. He said, that she would always be dear to him as a sister, and that he repented having been so foolish as to comfort her by letting her entertain a hope for

the future, which he knew could never under any circumstances be fulfilled.

“Who can know?” the Princess rejoined quickly, and observing the glance of questioning astonishment he turned on her, she repeated with emphasis: “who can know? What can we see of the future which lies before us, prepared for, and not by us? Did you know when you left San Spirito and became Gianbattista’s pupil, that you would one day relate, here at Roccaforte, to one who was then a little toddling child in England, your own story and the love troubles of Gianbattista’s daughter, whose hero was then a baby in arms carried in his nurse’s arms about his Yorkshire grounds?—We only know that all must be good that our Father ordains for us.”

Once more she gave him her hand, which he kissed reverentially.

“Now let us talk of something else Filippo,” said she, wishing to see him himself again. “You did right not to crush poor Stella’s hopes. One can’t exist without hope, at least the very young cannot. And if Stella meanwhile picks up things and acquires some knowledge, it will all be of use to her whatever happens. We must leave the rest to God. Now I

want to consult you about our Corpus Christi festival. As this is the first time we shall have been at Roccaforte on that day, the Prince wishes to take part in the procession from the Franciscan monastery to the two chapels, and he wants our share in it to be organized in a solemn and beautiful manner. Sister Monica is going to dress six of her school girls as angels. Stella is to head them, and you must arrange her costume. Come and see about it now!"

He followed her into the open air, with a deep reverence and love for her in his heart. She had relieved him of a great weight which had always oppressed him till now. A sense of inward freedom and intense relief made him feel that he would go to the end of the world for Charlotte and the Prince, to whom he owed this happy state of mind.

As they were descending to the wooded meadowland, at the foot of the steep declivity on which the villa stood, they met the head gardener with his men and some others, who had gone with him to help to wreath garlands, and to make bouquets for the morrow's festival. They were to decorate the triumphal arch which had been erected between the villa and the neighbouring Franciscan monastery. Huge baskets of

wild flowers had been gathered to strew the road along which the pyx would be carried to the chapel belonging to the monastery, after it had gone the round of the park.

Every one bore his respective part in these preparations. The Prince had given his consent to a display of fireworks, which, with Orlando and Marco's help, was to be let off in the evening. The Princess had sent an altar cloth, worked by herself, over to the monastery, for the Host to rest upon, and now making inquiries about the decorations, she turned back towards the villa with sister Monica and her school children, the steward's daughters and Stella, the troop of men and boys bringing up the rear, and none of the party chatted more gaily than she did.

Marco was walking at Stella's side. Since his conversation with Filippo he had approached her oftener, and would not be repulsed, and as Filippo had a better opinion of him now, and tried to make Stella think more kindly of him too, she had been lately as civil to him as to any one else, and really had endeavoured to conquer her dislike for him.

This emboldened Marco, more than Stella had intended. He had come up to her now with much

confidence and self assurance, and remarked that to-morrow would be a glorious feast. He counted up the fireworks that were to be let off, and said: "Their Highnesses themselves don't know yet which will be the best of all. We have contrived a special firework for them, which, after pouring out a shower of golden rain, will form itself into the letters S. and C., and with a huge star underneath burn in a brilliant illumination and change colour."

"Fireworks are great fun," mused Stella, "it is only a pity that they are so soon over, and leave darkness behind them."

"Bravo! You are like me, you like things to last and be constant," replied Marco. "Ah! I know a lovely star* that always burns brightly and delights the audience."

"But it must burn out, and come to an end, if it is a firework."

"No, it won't, my beauty! I don't mean a firework, but a star, I tell you."

"Well, it will set and disappear as all the other stars do."

* Stella is the Italian for Star.

“But come back again and shine like you!” he said, seizing her hand.

She snatched it away quickly.

“I didn’t mean that!” she cried. “You were in jest and I joked with you because you have not been behaving lately, quite as if my mother had only brought me into the world to please you and do your bidding. I was willing enough to believe Lippo when he said you are more sensible now than you used to be, and good and honest. I am good and honest too but—tastes differ. I may have my own opinion.”

“Till you are mine, yes!” he said laughing, for he was in the very best of tempers.

“That will never be. You must not think of it!” she said earnestly.

He threw back his head and laughed scornfully: “They all say that, all of them, till a fellow’s got them.” It is the old story.

E cosi' si fa l'amore,
Prima di no, e poi di si!
E l'amor si fa cosi'
Prima di no, e poi di si!

And singing the last line of the old song in a loud baritone he left her. As Stella parted from

the others close to the villa to go into the house, he called out from the distance: "Good evening, my pretty star!" and laughed his noisy, self-satisfied laugh once more.

Charlotte lost no time in informing the Prince of what had passed between herself and Filippo; she said how well he had taken it, how frankly he had spoken of his past life to her, and that although he had shown great emotion it had evidently done him good to confide in her. The Prince thanked her for carrying out his wish so promptly, and then the subject was dropped, for the procession was the order of the day, and at that moment Sister Monica was announced. She had brought her angels, for the Princess to say what she thought of them. Filippo and Stella were summoned, because Sister Monica had brought with her the huge white wings which Stella was to try on. Stella, practised and skilled in such arts, speedily arrayed herself in the snowy draperies and wings; and when she stood before her master and mistress, a gold band in her long curling hair, her figure looking slighter and taller than usual in the loose white dress, which fell round her in graceful folds, and a tall lily in her slender hand, the Prince,

although he had seen her every day for some months, was quite dazzled and enchanted with her beauty.

“She does positively look like an ethereal being!” he exclaimed in French.

She did not understand his words, but his admiration did not escape her, she turned to him with a pleased and friendly smile. “Do you like the dress, Highness,” she asked. “Ah, I am so glad! Shall I sing the hymn, if Lippo will play it? I know it by heart from beginning to end.”

“It is impossible not to love this sweet creature!” the Prince exclaimed again.

“Poor Wilfrid thinks so, too,” replied the Princess, “and that is why he keeps away.”

Meanwhile other persons had come for advice and orders. The hour at which the procession was to start, was settled. Early the next morning, the two priests came up to the villa to accompany the pilgrims to the monastery, where the inhabitants of the surrounding hamlets and parishes were to meet for the march round the monastery, and from thence to the chapel in the wood.

Peggy stood on the terrace with the few members

of the retinue whom it was absolutely necessary to leave behind, and watched the train as it set out.

From every hill the pilgrims streamed down into the valley, in crowds. The servants who had remained above prayed and crossed themselves, and remarked every now and then with admiring gestures what a magnificent procession it was, and who ever saw such a beauty as Stella!

It was a beautiful sight, even Peggy was obliged to acknowledge it, but it was sinful for all that, worse than anything she had seen as yet. She knew when she came to Rome that she would be shocked, but she had not thought it would be quite as bad as this. Was this a proper way of serving Christ? Did he desire all these ceremonies from Christians? "Oh, it's a hard and terrible trial for me," she groaned, "to stand by and see such things!"

The whole week through she had been thinking that God gives his creatures much to bear in life, with which they must put up, if they are good servants, although they may not have been brought up to expect it.

She who had nursed and waited on Miss Charlotte and Master Wilfrid, had been obliged to sit and

sew with the lady's maid and the nun, at dresses for these angels, mere peasants' children! Now, there they were winding along at a snail's pace, the clergymen and the angels; and her Princess and the Prince, with candles in their hands in broad daylight, and among all the servants and people. "If Lady Jane were obliged to stand by and see it as I am!" she said to herself, "what would she say! They only want Mr. Wilfrid there; I suppose he would not object to walk with them as he went to Gianbattista's funeral! Oh, dear me!"

Her hands shook and her lips quivered. She drew the blue silk shade on her hat low over her sad old face and turned away.

All the entrances and doors of the villa stood wide open, for the attendants were still on the terrace.

"None of them are at their posts and doing their duty, but me and the poor dogs," she muttered in her pain and anger, while she fed and patted the animals, which had been forgotten in all the excitement of the morning.

Then she went into her closet to pray, in a manner pleasing to the Lord, out of a good sensible

English prayer book. This did her good, she felt calmer, and more able to reason afterwards.

It was her duty to obey and serve her mistress, not to judge her! Had not God punished her with childlessness for turning a Catholic and not remaining in England? And was not that enough? Besides Corpus Christi only came once a year.

She repeated "Our Father" again, and emphasized with fervour "Lead us not into temptation, and forgive us our trespasses." Then the prayer-book slipped from her lap, she began to nod, and soon fell into a gentle doze.

A few hours later the procession was all over. Distinguished and humble alike returned to the villa. The servants were all busy, Peggy among the rest, flying hither and thither. Dinner was being served in the large dining hall for the guests, many of whom were owners of other villas in the neighbourhood. They had come over to Roccaforte to attend the functions, and the Prince and Princess had persuaded them to stay for the festa in the evening. The hospitable host and hostess did the honours of their table with their usual grace and courtesy, and the party was a lively one. The *merenda* in the steward's

house went off quite as successfully; the band was in its place, and the musicians, who had been specially engaged, surpassed themselves; then the dancing began. It was altogether a magnificent festa. The steward dispensed the contents of larder and cellar with an unstinting hand. The fireworks, and particularly the one prepared as a surprise for the princely pair, were a tremendous success and loudly applauded. Chinese lanterns were dotted about on the laurel bushes and beech-trees, but it was such a light, fair evening that their illumination was really not needed. All over the grounds, people were dancing by their soft light, and Stella delighted the spectators, as she had done on that October day in the Vigne Verdi, when she made her first appearance in public. Yes, that had been the first time, and this was to be the last!—

It grew darker, the lamps shone brighter, and the merriment became louder. Stella had danced with all the steward's daughters in turn. Then Filippo, as if acting on a sudden impulse, came up to her, and asked her to dance a Saltarello with him.

“Ah! come along!” she cried, radiant with joy, and her delight increased his. Never had they been

so happy together as at this moment. Both of them went into the dance with all their souls, their spirits becoming more and more exuberant the quicker they moved, till at last Filippo, throwing himself on his knees, took Stella in his arms and lifted her high in the air. She alighted safely on her feet, and her fresh young lips imprinted a kiss on his noble brow, as a reward for his good dancing.

Of course, this was an exception to the rule and a defiance of the established Roman custom, for the dancer is never allowed to touch even his partner's dress; but the lookers-on were charmed with the unconventionality, and clapped their hands vociferously, while the Prince's guests could not sufficiently praise Filippo and Stella.

"The Muse's salute to Genius!" exclaimed the old Marchese Serrabene, a member of the Arcadian academy, while Stella, confused at her own impulsive action, withdrew and concealed herself in the crowd.

The Prince patted Filippo on the shoulder. "Bravo!" he said. "I like you in this rôle. Roman blood must glow as long as it is young. Well done!"

As he spoke, a swarm of rockets whizzed into the

air, and burst with a loud bang; Bengal lights followed, making everything red, blue and green in succession. Stella was watching the fairy scene from under a great oak tree where she had taken refuge, when Marco stood beside her.

The applause which Filippo had gained for his dancing with her, had made Marco uneasy. He knew that he was a splendidly proportioned fellow, and that he could dance the Saltarello with a display of muscular skill of which Filippo was incapable; and as no one had blamed *him*, but only evinced pleasure when he had lifted Stella into the air, why shouldn't *he* have the rapture of holding the girl's lovely, supple form in his arms.

"Ah, my angel, so here you are!" he cried. "People who hide like this, always want to be looked for and found! Come, they are still dancing. Quick, there's time for another Saltarello! or—" and he bent over her as she did not move—"or shall we stay here together alone, sweet one?"

"Go away!" she cried angrily. "No, we will go back!" she added more calmly, beginning to advance as she spoke towards the crowd. "I am not inclined for any more dancing."

“Why has this mood come on all at once? You seemed to be quite up to it just now?” She did not answer. He repeated his question as they stepped out of the shadow of the trees into the light. He had noticed something strange in her voice before, now he could see how sad and weary her face was, and because in his secret heart he really looked upon her as belonging to him, he said with a tenderness that was unusual in him, “Tell me, Stella, what’s the matter with you?”

“Ah!” she sighed, her heart was so full that she must speak, “I was only thinking how beautiful it was that time when I danced at the Vigne Verdi, and that I was much, much happier then; but the next day my father lay dead, and——”

“And that’s why you’ve been moping in the dark?” exclaimed Marco in amused wonder, “that’s why you are sad? Gianbattista was old, and we all die sometime or other. Hark! that is the Saltarello Nilo played in the Vigne!”

“Yes, so it is!” said Stella as they joined the rest, but she would not let herself be talked into dancing again. A heavy weight was at her heart and she had gloomy forebodings of she knew not what. Unable

to get the thoughts of her first dance at the Vigne out of her head, and seeing Wilfrid's face before her wherever she turned, she would not talk to Marco or any one else for the rest of the evening.

CHAPTER VII.

A MONTH, all but a few days, had passed away. Everybody had enjoyed the peaceful existence, and found it hard to believe that the middle of July had nearly come. The Prince was well satisfied with the progress of his draining operations. The new house which was being built in the *métairie* grew daily; the news from Anciesella and Rome was favourable, only the Conclave had not yet come to any decision, the new Pope was still unchosen. But everyone hoped that what had taken so long to decide would prove satisfactory.

Filippo worked at the chapel picture, and was about to put the last stroke that morning to the Princess's portrait. Stella was present at the sitting, as usual, with her needlework. At midday the Prince came in to inspect the finished picture.

He expressed himself thoroughly satisfied with the likeness, and praised the whole tone of the composi-

tion, and the admirable and delicate execution of the details, with the discernment of a true connoisseur and art critic.

“But now,” he said, “you mustn’t forget to put the date and the age of the Princess in the corner of the picture. It is one of the sensible customs of old times, and where it has been omitted in our family portraits, I have supplied the deficiency as well as I was able. You must add your name too, and your monogram.”

“I haven’t one,” replied Filippo.

The Prince said he must devise a monogram, and they began to think of an appropriate one. The Prince and Charlotte proposed several allegorical designs, and it gradually dawned on Stella what they were talking about.

Charlotte wanted an arrow flying upwards. The Prince thought this would be far-fetched and not characteristic; he therefore suggested to Filippo to twist the two first letters of his name beneath a star.

“Yes,” cried Stella, who had been so quiet hitherto that they had forgotten her presence, “yes, Lippo, that’s the best thing you can have! Your star!”

“His star? What does that mean?” asked Charlotte.

“Have you never seen it, Highness?” exclaimed Stella, jumping up, “of course it’s not so easy to see, now that he’s grand, and always wears cuffs to his shirts. But it’s there, for he was born with it. Show them, Filippo.”

“No, no, leave it alone,” said Filippo gruffly.

But she was accustomed to have her way with him, and seized his left arm, turned up the sleeve of his velvet coat, then unfastening his cuff, exclaimed, “Look here! It is nothing ugly or horrid, but a real little star!”

Just near the spot where the great blue artery was visible on the inside of Filippo’s wrist, beneath his dark skin, there was a small mole, which was distinctly and unmistakably like a star in shape.

Charlotte looked at the curious mark with an amused smile, the Prince came and stood beside her to examine it with her. Scarcely had he glanced at it before the blood rushed to his brow, and the veins stood out on his temples. He caught hold of Filippo’s hand almost violently, and fixed his eyes earnestly upon him; he was on the point of uttering an exclama-

tion, but controlled himself quickly, and turning to the Princess he said, "These freaks of Nature are very remarkable.—But Stella is right! Take her advice, Filippo! and put this sign above your name. It will be doing homage to the maiden who helped you, if not led you to your first successes."

The Prince's strange demeanour had not escaped them, least of all Charlotte. To ask him the cause of it in the presence of the others, was not to be thought of, and as, a few moments later, they went in to luncheon, there was no hope of an explanation then.

The Prince was as talkative as usual throughout the meal, but Charlotte was restless and abstracted, although she did not wish to appear so. Directly they rose from the table the Prince retired, saying he had a great many letters to write. The afternoons were generally spent now in siesta, for the intense heat made this absolutely necessary, therefore both Charlotte and Filippo withdrew soon after the Prince had left them.

The artist went to his room and flung himself on his couch. The last few days he had been keeping rather late hours in company with some young men, who had been the steward's guests, and for the sake

of his work he had been obliged to rise early. Now, he had closed the shutters, and composed himself for the afternoon nap he sorely needed.

But how could he sleep, when he saw the Prince with that strange startled expression before his eyes, whether he kept them shut or open? He still felt the vibration of his hand, as he convulsively grasped his arm; and the look he had given him! that long, searching look straight into his eyes! His heart beat, and his brain reeled, when he tried to account for it.

What did it all mean? Why had the Prince shown so much emotion at the sight of the mole on his arm? Could he have known anyone with the same peculiar mark? Was it conceivable, or in the slightest degree possible, that this might throw some light on the darkness which enshrouded his advent into the world? Years ago he had given up all hopes of solving the mystery of his birth, and had at last resigned himself to the thought that it never would be cleared up. Charlotte's sympathy and friendship had again reminded him forcibly of the cloud that hung over him, and now the occurrences of to-day had thrown him back with one blow into that whirl of perplexities, from

which, after a hard battle, he had fancied he had extricated himself for ever.

His thoughts were thus engaged when there was a knock at the door. The Prince stood before him. It was the first time he had ever entered Filippo's room.

Filippo sprang to his feet, hastily put on his coat, and asked the Prince what he could do for him.

"Stay where you are!" replied the latter, sitting down in the roomy arm-chair as he spoke. "I have come to ask you a question. The Princess has lately had a conversation with you upon the events of your early life, and learnt from you that you had no knowledge of your parents. You know that since that moment you have had our tenderest sympathy. We have felt more than we can say for your lonely position in the world, and have been able to understand what a saddening influence it must have had on your life."

He paused for a moment, and Filippo's heart beat as he saw with what an effort the Prince maintained his composure.

"To-day," he continued, "Stella drew our attention in her lively way to the mole on your wrist. I was struck with it, for I once knew someone who had just

such a mole on the same spot on the left wrist. It occurred to me that this might help you to find out those persons to whom you owe your existence, for they might now, if alive, probably be in a condition to receive you. One should not neglect taking any measures which may lead to a solution of such a problem, especially not in a case like yours; for you are sure of your individuality, honour and distinction, which you have deserved and won by your own exertions. Did you never ask at San Spirito, where they keep such conscientious registers, whether it was not likely that in later years inquiries might be made for you there?"

"I never crossed the threshold of San Spirito after the day I left it, your Highness. Why should I have done so, when I had been emphatically told that no one would ever wish to know what had become of me?" answered Filippo in painful excitement.

"Do not forget that with time the complexion of things change! But perhaps you have the papers in which that statement is made. I would not for the world awaken a groundless hope within you, but I think the matter is worth an investigation. Have you any written statement in your possession?"

Filippo went to the writing table where he kept his small possessions, took out his pocket-book, and handed the Prince the desired paper, which did not take long to peruse.

It was a coarse piece of paper, and upon it were the few ill-spelt, ill-written lines mentioned before: "He was given in private baptism the name Filippo. May the holy Church prove a mother to him!—He will *never* be asked for."—The writer had appended no date. But the guardians at the Foundlings' Home had inscribed beneath, "February 26th, 1815," and the hour of the day on which the boy was received at the Home, and had stamped the label with their seal, to show that a copy had been made of it.

The Prince scanned the document earnestly, and then put it down. "And you have nothing else? Not the smallest clue to guide you on the right track?"

"Yes, your Highness, I have the shawl in which they rolled me up before casting me adrift, and please do not laugh at me, but I have always carried it about with me, partly from superstition and partly from a desire to have something suggestive of home, something to give me a feeling of belonging to her,—"

his voice trembled, "to the woman who spurned me, although she was my mother, and—"

"Hush, do not speak so!" commanded the Prince. "How can you know that you are not doing some unhappy creature, your own mother, a grievous wrong with these words? Get the shawl and show it me!"

Filippo took a parcel out of his box, which the Prince grasped eagerly, and rapidly tore away the coverings. It contained a white wrap, with broad red, black and yellow stripes running through it.

The Prince's eyes were riveted upon it, as if on some apparition from another world. With hasty, trembling fingers he caught hold of the corners.

"It is marked here!" said Filippo, guiding him to the right place. "Two hearts pierced by an arrow, and a star above."

"Yes, yes! That's it!" exclaimed the Prince, and no longer able to control himself, he clasped Filippo in his arms and wept over him.

Filippo could not speak, he felt in a dream. Nobody had ever embraced him, the bastard and out-cast, like this before, no heart had ever beat against his with such violent emotion! He kissed the Prince's

hand repeatedly. They were both overcome, but the Prince was the first to recover himself.

He sat down on an ottoman, and still holding Filippo's hand compelled him to do the same. "We shall not lose each other again!" he said, drawing a deep breath. "You may trust me for that!" After a short pause he added: "To me there is not a doubt in the matter! Filippo, I knew your mother and loved her.—Your likeness to her struck me the first time I saw you, when Don Matteo introduced you to me. But likenesses are so often accidental."

"Her name, tell me her name?" begged Filippo. "Who was my mother?"

"She was a Spaniard of good birth."

"And my father, your Highness?"

"Your mother married one of Napoleon's generals, she was the Countess Josephine Carmontrant."

"And where do my parents live?"

"Your mother and the general are both dead! He was killed at Waterloo."

"But my mother?"

"What her end was, I have never learnt;

but I am quite certain that she is dead. If it were not so she would certainly have made me some sign."

There was silence. Filippo's thoughts were in a maze, he was too bewildered to say anything, and the Prince had relapsed into deep meditation.

"The star on your wrist," he said at length, "makes me sure that you are Josephine's son, then there is the shawl, that is a clear proof;" he touched it gently as he spoke, and with a melancholy smile continued: "Inanimate things, the work of our hands in leisure moments or capricious humours, outlive us and our joys and sorrows! Once when I was parting from your mother, I scratched myself with a pin she had stuck in her dress, and I drew this little device with my blood on the white ground. With loving hands, so she told me later, she worked over it in red silk. Preserve it, Filippo, as a holy relic, for through it you are sacred to me! But I have said enough for to-day!"

He stood up, pressed his newly found son's hand, and said: "I need not add that for the present it is better for us to keep my secret, our secret, inviolate.

I will consider whether it is possible to obtain acknowledgment in society for the son of the Countess, the son of a woman greatly beloved by me. As soon as I know clearly what to do, we will talk more about it. Till then, go on with your work as if nothing had happened. Work has proved my support and solace in trouble; it will divert your mind now from brooding on the great change in your prospects which may be in store for you."

He laid his hands on Filippo's shoulders and gazed at him yearningly, then he left him and walked with a firm, slow step along the corridor to the wing where his and the Princess's apartments were situated.

Directly he reached his room he hurried to his writing table. "The Countess's child, my son, is here under my roof!" he wrote, his pen flying over the paper. "The Princess does not know it yet. Come immediately, and if the Princess's cousin is still in Rome, urge him to accompany you. Tell him that I particularly wish it. Come both of you without delay, but appear as if you were unexpected."

He addressed the letter to Don Matteo; the

priest of Santa Maria Traspontina, rang the bell and ordered the servant to summon the steward, who appeared a few minutes later. Meanwhile he had put Don Matteo's letter in a sealed envelope for the steward of the Palazzo Roccaforte, whom he charged to deliver the enclosure without loss of time to the priest.

"This letter must be in Rome as soon as possible. Orlando or your son-in-law can have the black mare. He had better stay a couple of days, and let the animal rest. See that he starts at once."

"Your orders shall be obeyed, your Highness! Shall inquiries be made whether the Princess has any commissions?"

"No! There is no time to be lost."

"With Your Highness' permission I will send my son-in-law."

"As you please, only he must go directly! Instantly!"

The steward bowed low; the Prince, quite worn out, threw himself back in his chair. Anxious thoughts passed through his mind. He felt there were trying

times coming for him and the wife whom he loved so well, and who had given herself and her future so trustingly into his hands. All his strength of mind and self-control would be needed in the next few weeks for his own sake, for Charlotte's, and his son's.

A great paternal love had already sprung up in his heart.

CHAPTER VIII.

IT was getting late when the priest called on Wilfrid. They had been meeting constantly of late, and they either chatted in Wilfrid's studio, or took a walk together in the cool of the evening, when the long expected Papal election was generally discussed.

The priest's coming at such an unusually late hour this evening made Wilfrid naturally suppose he had brought some news, and he exclaimed as he shook hands: "A great event must have happened, Don Matteo, to bring you here as late as this! Is the Pope chosen?"

"No, Signore!" replied the priest with a gesture of negation peculiar to him, "that blessing is not granted us yet. What I have to say this evening concerns you personally. I want to know if you feel disposed to accompany me to Roccaforte to-morrow. It would be doing me an honour, and of course your relations would be delighted to see you."

Wilfrid was taken by surprise, for he knew that the priest had had no intention of paying a visit to Roccaforte the day before. "Why do they require your presence so suddenly at the villa, is anything the matter?" he asked quickly.

"I think I told you the other day," Matteo replied, "that I had heard from the Princess, and that she, as I gathered from the letter, desired my spiritual aid. Then I had hopes that the election of our Holy Father would speedily be brought to a conclusion. But as it is still pending, I consider myself bound, as the Princess's soul is in my charge, to go to her; then besides her, there are His Highness, your friend Filippo, and my nephew out there, all of whom belong to my flock, and I must not forget Stella."

He need not have mentioned her. Stella had been Wilfrid's first and only thought when the priest made his proposal. But in any case it was his duty to pay his respects to the Prince and bid farewell to Charlotte before he left the country. He did not care to wait another month for the Pope's election; he felt that he must decide at once, and at that moment it seemed expedient to seize this opportunity; so he asked Matteo at what time he intended to set out.

“After early mass, if that is convenient to you. On such occasions as these the Prince’s landau and post-horses are at my disposal; so we shall not be long on the road.”

Wilfrid thanked him, and it was arranged that the priest should call for him, and as it was a beautiful night, the younger man volunteered to walk home with the older one. So they strolled together through the streets, enjoying each other’s society, and the air, which was now growing fresh and cool.

At parting Wilfrid inquired how long the priest proposed to stay. Matteo said that he was not obliged to return directly, as he had entrusted his parish to his curate’s care for the next week or so, and added, that it would be a pity for Wilfrid to hurry away, even if the Princess would spare him. She had in her last letter again regretted that he had not availed himself of her invitation and the Prince’s.

Wilfrid said that no one could regret it more than he did, expressed himself pleased that this chance had turned up of being able to make amends for his seeming ungraciousness, and it was very late when at last he bent his steps homewards. He packed the few things he would want during his short sojourn in

the villa, and went to bed in good spirits, blessing Chance as the helpful friend of the vacillating! He told himself, everything had turned out just as he could have wished. The prospect of passing a few days with his kind relations and Filippo, was an agreeable one. He had put some sketches in his portmanteau which he wished the friend to criticize, whose opinion he so highly valued. Yes, he would go and see them all *once* again, and Stella too, just as he had gone to fill his soul for the last time with the works of ancient and modern art he admired and loved most, before parting from them. Then he would travel northwards, visit Adalbert on the Rhine, and afterwards—he would go home, home to his native country and birthplace, for long, long years!

They started the next day at the appointed hour. The drive in itself was a pleasure. At about midday they arrived at the villa. The Princess and Filippo were as much rejoiced as surprised at the advent of two such unexpected guests. The Prince received them with his accustomed dignity and courtesy.

“You are a godsend to me at this moment,” the Princess whispered hurriedly to the priest as she

withdrew with him for a moment into the window. But there was no time to say more then.

Filippo's work, the portraits, and the picture for the chapel, as well as the chapel itself, were at once inspected, and they formed with the forthcoming election and the future Pope the principal topics of conversation. Although these subjects were interesting to Wilfrid, he felt hardly able to talk at all and was not as much at home as he expected.

The Princess was not herself, but excitable and distrait. She had always been tenderly thoughtful for her husband, but to-day she watched him with almost nervous attention. There was a greater and more striking change in Filippo, for which Wilfrid found it difficult to account. His complexion was sunburnt and ruddy, his chest had filled out, he walked with a light elastic step, and held his head proudly, while his eyes shone with a strange brilliance from beneath his broad, and thoughtful forehead. But he too had lost his old repose of manner, and Wilfrid was mystified when he noticed that he and the Prince constantly gazed long and earnestly at each other, as if under the spell of some irresistible fascination.

Something had happened. But what? Wilfrid

could not conjecture. In spite of the warm welcome he had received he felt *de trop*, and was quite relieved when he found himself alone in his room.

The Prince drew the priest aside as soon as he had an opportunity of doing so, and told him all that had passed in the last few days.

“I firmly believe that it is beyond all doubt that in Filippo I have found my son,” he said. “I am equally convinced that I ought publicly to recognize him as such. If the Princess does not present me with an heir (and I cannot hope that she ever will do so now), no one could raise an objection to my adopting him; indeed there would be nothing to hinder me from taking such a step. Without Filippo the race would have died out at my death. God has willed it differently! From the first Filippo attracted me; he has his mother’s eyes, and they appealed to my sympathies. Since I have had so much to do with him, he has won my regard and affection; and his noble nature, his many sided genius, and his sterling qualities would make him an ornament to any family. I am proud that he belongs to me, and I can only thank Heaven for this undeserved blessing, and you, Matteo, for having kept him straight for all these years!”

They clasped each other's hands. Both were moved, but they were too well accustomed to strange experiences to marvel at the turn events had taken.

"It ennobles and stimulates us," said the priest, "when Providence permits us to have a momentary glimpse of His wonderful and mysterious ways in relation to man. It has been granted your Highness to make atonement for a sin, and in that atonement, by the Lord's will, there lies a source of great happiness. That I, without knowing it, should have been the means of guiding your son to this house, the members of which I have from my earliest youth revered and served, and to whom I have become indissolubly attached, is the crowning blessing of my life and my old age, and I can only ask with all humility what I have done to deserve so great a gift from the hands of God!"

The Prince listened to Matteo's words with undisguised satisfaction. "I begged you to come here," he said, "for two reasons. Doubtless you have learnt through the Princess how much of the past she knows, and that this knowledge has disturbed her more than she will allow to me. I have been convinced since yesterday, that she half suspects the truth. I should not be doing right to keep her longer than is necessary in

this painful uncertainty. Her childlessness has always been a greater affliction to her than to me. My happiness now in the son of another woman whom I have loved, will be a severe trial, which she cannot be spared. You must stand by her and be her support in this trying hour, for she will unburden herself to you of all that her delicacy and refinement of feeling have caused her to keep from me."

"You may rely on me, and on the noble generous soul of the Princess."

"Yes, I build on that, I know she is too great and fine a character to be tormented with jealousy. Now for the second question. In those unhappy days when you instituted inquiries about the Countess, do you think it possible that you left anything undone? Is there in your opinion, now after thirty years, the remotest chance of supplementing my conviction with a legally valid proof that Filippo is the Countess's son, and of finding out where he was born?"

The priest shook his head, and said he believed not a stone had been left unturned at the time to ascertain where the Countess had gone. They both called to mind the many fruitless enterprises that had been set on foot for that object.

“The whole night long I have meditated upon it,” the Prince said. “The Count reached Anciesella late on the evening of the 21st of February; Filippo was left at San Spirito on the 27th. The last trace of the Count was the pass at Porta del Popolo, dated the 23rd. The San Spirito certificate describes Filippo as a weakly child, only a few days old. The Countess’s confinement must have taken place on the 23rd or 24th, and if this was the cause of her death, an examination of the churchyards and gravestones on the road might help us to an explanation.”

The priest considered this suggestion in silence, then he said, “Certainly nothing was done in that direction. We were looking for the living, not the dead. How I regret that this did not occur to me then, your Highness. But, when I left you, to travel in pursuit of the Count, we unfortunately had not you to direct us in our search.”

“Do not apologize, I do not blame you for carelessness, I am certain you did all you could,” said the Prince, “the question is: can we take any measures now? I wish to avoid a public inquiry, for the Princess’s and Filippo’s sake, and for other reasons. I would rather apply to his Eminence, the minister of

police, to make private investigations in the matter. The great point is to find out whether in any part of Rome at that date a foreigner died in childbirth, and where she was buried. But the Cardinal is sitting in conclave at present, and his subordinates——”

“Unquestionably,” the priest broke in, “the Capuchins will be in the secret. They are invariably called upon to officiate at secret funerals, a foreigner could not be buried in Rome without their knowing it. True, their General, the Cardinal, is also in conclave. However, they might issue orders through the Abbé, from their head quarters, that inquiries be made in all their monasteries. This could be done without attracting the least attention. Stella’s great uncle Padre Eusebio is one of their monks at the Piazza Barberini. It was he who, after Filippo was apprenticed to Gianbattista told me of the boy’s talent and inclination for art. Eusebio, in spite of his years, is, after the manner of a true Capuchin, always about, he knows the whole town by heart, and is in fact a walking chronicle. He is shrewd, and, as I know by experience, trustworthy. It would delight him to do Filippo a good turn, to be of service to Your Highness, and to have an object for his peregrinations.”

“That is a capital idea,” said the Prince, “write at once to the Abbé, tell him to communicate with Padre Eusebio, and will you kindly write to this Eusebio also. Tell him as much of the truth as is necessary. Let him know that the discovery of Filippo’s parents is the object we have in view, and instruct him what to do. Midwives and grave-diggers must be cross-questioned, and will need bribes for their information; so send him the necessary remittances. Say that he may be as liberal as he pleases, and that Filippo, if Eusebio is successful in obtaining the wished for tidings, will not forget to whom he is indebted, and will do something for his cloister in return.”

The priest said, he would write directly, but the Prince still had a few remarks to make.

“To-morrow, when the Princess and I have confessed to you,” he said, “as we intend to do, I will speak to her myself. Meanwhile look after Filippo. It was for him as well as the Princess that I wished her cousin to be here just now. I thought that the society of a friend near to them in age might make the lively emotions and sudden changes which await them easier to bear with calmness.”

CHAPTER IX.

WHEN Stella had returned from Sister Monica's that day, she had not found Peggy in her parlour, so she had sat down with her needlework to await the Princess's summons to the studio.

Suddenly, a carriage and post-horses clattered through the yard on which Peggy's windows looked out, into the coachhouse. There was nothing unusual in this. People continually drove over, but they did not always use post-horses. However, it did not strike Stella as being anything remarkable, and she quietly went on with her work, thinking, as she had thought a hundred times, how airy, and light, and pretty it was here, how much pleasanter than sitting with her grandmother in the smoky old workshop.

Presently Peggy bustled into the room, flushed and excited.

"What do you think?" she cried, "I have got a piece of news for you. Your priest has come."

“Our good priest!” exclaimed Stella. “Ah! that is nice. How glad her Highness will be, and Filippo!”

“And he has brought Mr. Wilfrid with him, and what’s more, they are both going to stop here.”

Stella sprang to her feet with a bound; then sat down again without speaking.

Peggy came to the table, smiling blandly. “I am glad to see,” she said, “that you have learnt your manners! A young girl who is going to be lady’s maid in a Princess’s family oughtn’t to be wild as a mad thing. That’s what you were, you know, when they brought you to me. The next thing will be to get you dressed like a respectable servant. It won’t do to have you as gaily clad as a mountebank always! And pray, why should Mr. Wilfrid concern *you*?”

Stella did not answer, but her heart thumped, and her hands trembled so that she could not guide her needle. Her only thought was how she could manage to see him.

“He won’t come out here into the yard, that is certain,” she said to herself, “neither will he go to dinner at the steward’s. The Princess won’t work to-day or send for me; and I can’t hang about the corridors and staircases, for I have no business there.”

She could have cried with vexation. There was no hope of seeing him before the evening, when the party would come out for a stroll or take a drive. She looked at the clock. It was not midday yet, and there was all the long, long afternoon, before evening would come.

She counted the hours and the ticking of the clock, but that did not make the hands move any faster. At last, it was time for dinner; the meal seemed as if it would never be over. They went back to Peggy's room. The old dame moved constantly backwards and forwards between the Princess's apartments and her own. No carriage was taken to the coach-house, no horse was led to the stables, not a servant, or groom appeared in the yard. It had never been so deadly quiet and deserted before. Time hung as heavy as lead on Stella's hands, the dullness and silence oppressed her. She was sick and weary of sewing and waiting.

But in the spacious reception rooms of the villa, there was another to whom the hours seemed to go as slowly as to poor Stella, although he would not own it.

At noon when they had stood before the great

canvas in the studio, and the Prince and Princess had retired, leaving them alone together, Wilfrid said to Filippo, with an indifference on which he congratulated himself: "How does Stella get on out here?"

"Capitally!" Filippo replied. "She lives with Peggy, takes lessons from Sister Monica, and the Princess interests herself in her; they do church work together."

"Then she will not go back to Rome?"

"Not till the family return, when she will accompany them. Your cousin has as good as told me that she intends keeping her in her service."

All this had been said without the least manifestation of feeling on either side, and both were glad that it was so. Filippo hoped his friend had forgotten Stella, and that she would be now patiently resigned to his forgetfulness. Wilfrid remarked with no little astonishment that Filippo seemed to have given up Stella, indeed to have turned his back on the past altogether. He appeared to have lost all interest in it. He did not inquire for Adalbert, or any other of his Roman acquaintances and friends. Evidently, his mind was engrossed with something else. His devotion to

the Princess was only too apparent, and perhaps this had something to do with his strangely indifferent manner when he talked of his own affairs.

“Was it possible,” Wilfrid asked himself, “that Filippo’s desires had become too ambitious?—When he was near him, the Prince’s eyes were always upon him. What had made Charlotte so anxious a short time ago for her priest’s advice? What had brought about such a rapid and complete change in Filippo? Why was Charlotte so ill at ease and abstracted?”

There was not such a disparity of years between Filippo and the Princess, as between Charlotte and her husband; his freshness and originality, her position and culture, might have proved dangerous attractions during the life of comparative solitude they had been leading.

Wilfrid was ashamed of his suspicions, but he could not shake them off directly, because he had himself experienced how, all unawares, an inclination will sometimes find its way into our hearts.

“Who can trust himself?” he had thought when he had observed Charlotte, the Prince and Filippo at table; and now that he was alone, the uncomfortable idea haunted him and gave him no peace.

There was plenty of literature on the table beside him, among which, English newspapers and periodicals were conspicuous. He took them up, but could not read. Why should that far-off political world concern him here, in this peaceful retreat? He thought again of Charlotte and his friend. He wondered why the latter had not accompanied him to his room, it was strange, too, that Peggy had not come as usual to pour out her heart to him in good English.

He must find out what had been going on in the villa, what had come to them all. He knew where Peggy's room was, and how to find his way there. If he met Stella there, so much the better. He must and would see her again, and it was as well that it should be in the presence of a third person. A few minutes later he stood at Peggy's door, assuring himself that he had never felt calmer in his life.

"Who is there?" asked *not* Peggy but a voice whose low, clear tones he knew.

"Friends!" he answered according to the custom of the country. Instantly the door was opened; they were standing face to face.

"Wilfrid!" she cried, trying hard to suppress her

feelings. "Signor Wilfrid!" she repeated half ashamed of, yet radiant in, her ecstasy.

But he had seized both her hands and drawn her to him. His kiss burned on her lips, her arms wound themselves about his neck.

"You love me!" she murmured exultantly, beaming upon him as she held back her head to gaze into his face.

"Love you? What have I done since I first saw you but love you and think and dream of you, soul of my life?" he exclaimed, forgetting all his good intentions, and everything else, in the rapturous delight of holding this lovely, gracious creature in his arms.

"Yes!" she cried, clapping her hands like a child, in innocent triumph, "yes, of course you love me, and you will marry me, and take me with you to your country. I knew you would all the time. Come! we must tell Lippo directly. Ah! they will all be so pleased, Lippo, and the dear good Princess, and our good kind priest, that the holy Madonna has heard my prayer, and made you a Christian! Oh Wilfredo! my Wilfredo! I am so happy! so very happy!"

As the accurately tuned strings of an Æolian harp ring false when a violent wind sweeps them, so his im-

passioned heart thrilled into discord at her words; but Stella did not notice the change.

“Tell me it is true,” she said, clinging to him tenderly, “that if you marry me and take me home with you, your mother won’t hate and abhor me, as Peggy said she would. She will love me as well as she loves you, won’t she?”

In her innocence she had roused him from the delicious intoxication of his happiness, and thrown him back into the old combat which he had been fighting for months, in which he imagined he had come off victor at last, so that he would be able to meet Stella composedly, and say goodbye to her with perfect self-possession. Where was this self-possession now?”

“Who can trust himself?” this question that he had carelessly asked himself an hour ago, thinking of others, rose to his lips now, fraught with bitter significance; and there were Stella’s eyes expressing wonder that his arm had loosened round her slender waist, that he did not clasp her to his side, or go on kissing the glowing, scarlet lips, which laughed at him as if to allure him to do so.

How could he resist her? He held her to his heart

again and covered her with kisses, when Peggy stood before them: they had not heard her coming.

She raised her hands in the air, and then clenched them together in the utmost dismay. She had been young in her time, old Peggy, and it was not difficult to read what shone from Stella's eyes, and glowed on her young gentleman's cheeks and brow.

They both rose and approached her with a joyous greeting, but Peggy motioned them back. "Hush," she said to Stella. "Oh, Mr. Wilfrid!" she remonstrated, "this is not right. Think what you are doing, Sir! She is a good, innocent child, and an orphan! My Princess has given her into my charge. And, dear Mr. Wilfrid, think of Lady Jane! Such a Catholic child, too."

Wilfrid was not in the humour to tolerate remonstrances and reproaches, and, irritated at the old servant's opposition, he said.

"Spare yourself the trouble of interfering in my affairs. What I choose to do is my business; do not forget your place. I alone am answerable to Filippo and the Princess, and not—"

She would not let him go on. "Sir!" she said, and her real earnestness and concern made her appear

quite worthy of veneration in his eyes. "Sir! what does it matter to Mr. Filippo who is not Stella's brother, or to the Princess? But Lady Jane!—oh dear!—She is such a young thing Sir! she won't die of grief here in her own country. There are hundreds who console themselves. The priest's nephew has his intentions with regard to Stella, and would do very well for her. But just think, Lady Jane has only you, you are her only comfort."

"You have no right to meddle in this!" Wilfrid replied impatiently. "I know you mean well, but that's enough! I am capable of managing my own concerns!"

Peggy, though she was not used to such harshness from him, was undaunted, she placed herself between him and the girl and looking him straight in the face replied, "Yes Sir, but I am also answerable for what I do. Stella was confided to my care by her Highness, and I must do my duty by her." Then she suddenly went off on another track. "Forgive me, Sir!" she implored, "I am ready to believe that you know what you are about, for you wouldn't be your mother's son if you did not. But have patience for a day or two yet. Just for a day or two let Stella go on as usual with my eye upon her. Don't speak to Miss Charlotte

about it directly, then—well, she is not herself just now, indeed my dear Princess isn't like herself!"

"Why is it, what does it all mean?" he asked, his own apprehensions and doubts about his cousin again awakened.

"I can't tell you, Sir! at least I can tell you nothing certain. We must leave it to come out of itself. But something has happened, or is going to happen, and something very bad! All of a sudden the Princess has become another creature. Any one who has been so long in the service of gentry as I have been, knows how to keep eyes and ears open. I understand this house and its ways as well as I understood your house and its ways in England, and I can see plainly things are not going straight. Yesterday Arnolfo, the steward's son-in-law, was sent off post haste to the palace in Rome, without my lady being asked if she wanted anything done there, or anything fetched, as she almost always does. Before that, the Prince was shut up alone with the painter in his room, where he has never set foot before, for goodness knows how long a time. And to-day here comes the priest, who never came before, without giving the Princess warning as a gentleman ought. And he has been

closeted with the Prince more than an hour. To-morrow they are all going to take the Sacrament, in the half sort of way they do it here, only the bread without the wine, and Stella will be among them of course."

Yes! thought he, to-morrow after confession Stella, and he, too, would be in Don Matteo's hands. She stood now wondering why he had so much to say in that foreign tongue to Peggy, and why he kept her waiting so long for more caresses and endearing words.

He put his arms round her, but Peggy persisted in her entreaties.

"Now Sir!" she went on. "It is not my business, as you say, for you are your own master and at liberty to do as you think best; only wait till they've taken the Sacrament, and till we know what's happened here. Let Stella alone just now, leave her to me, Sir, and tell her not to breathe a word of this to anyone."

The faithful servant's supplications, together with his own fears, were not without their effect upon him; it was not difficult to persuade Stella to keep her own counsel for the present and not to tell Filippo. It was convenient to him that it should be so, for he had not come to Peggy's room with the intention of betrothing

himself; only the sight of Stella had scattered all his good resolutions.

He entered his apartment again in a very different frame of mind from the one in which he had left it. The passion he had believed he had strangled, had now a more powerful hold on him than ever. It was not only a mad delirium; Stella's love made him intensely happy, his heart responded to hers with infinite tenderness. But the necessity of coming to some definite decision stared him in the face, and the sacrifice, on whichever side it was made, would be a hard one, the cruel pain it would cause inevitable.

As he paced up and down the room, torn by conflicting emotions, he saw now the stern figure of his mother, then the sweet, fair girl he loved. Suddenly he recalled some words he had once let fall to Matteo, when they had chanced to meet in St. Peter's and had compared its size with St. Paul's in London, by the measures given on the mosaic floor.

"The chill emptiness of St. Paul's makes one shiver," he had said, "and one's eyes instinctively wander to the single Cross which reigns there, as to a refuge and support in the vast wilderness, while, on the other hand, when one enters St. Peter's, so rich in

colouring and decoration, one's heart warms and expands!" Matteo had listened to this with friendly attention, but had made no comment. Indeed he had always avoided defending or singing the praises of his Church in any marked way, but had only casually given Wilfrid his opinion on such subjects; and where the close connection, between the Church and her religious rites with the fine arts, was the question, they were nearly always agreed.

The priest was aware that Wilfrid, since he had lived in Italy, had separated himself entirely from the austere Calvinistic views of his mother; in fact, that he was only orthodox, so far as the English custom requires it, which makes adherence to some Church or other, a kind of civil duty for all men.

Wilfrid had not disguised that he considered there was much that was questionable in the doctrine of Catholicism. Nevertheless he admitted that the Catholic Church meets the wants of many natures more adequately than the rigorous, more abstract teaching of the northern, reformed Churches, which refers man to himself and himself alone for a conception of the Unseen, ignoring symbols and any objective aids to the imagination.

He could not fancy Stella and Filippo worshipping in a bare Church. Such children of the south must have the form and substance of what they are called upon to believe as much as possible before them; and not only did he agree with Matteo, that the presence of the artistic and beautiful in places of worship is stimulating and an incentive to culture, but he was willing to allow that in some lives confession in its ideal sense might prove a consolation and a blessing.

His education had made him respect and acknowledge any creed to which the heart and spirit of men respond, and by which they are elevated and ennobled; then he was fully persuaded that the root of the matter is the same in all communions, and, moreover, that in every religion there is a residuum of mystery, which faith alone can grasp, and which philosophy and natural science have hitherto been able to realize only by conjectures.

So, oscillating between toleration and indifference, Wilfrid's admiration for Roman æsthetics had grown, till now for the first time he asked himself, whether he was in a position to cut himself adrift altogether, from the moorings of his past, and, for the sake of Stella and

her love, for him to embrace the Catholic faith without any very decided convictions?

He knew there were only two roads open to him, and yet in his heart's agony he tried to think of others. He entertained the idea of eloping with Stella; in a foreign country, in England, he thought, he could marry her without calling on her to renounce her Church and creed. He hoped that when the thing was done, his mother might be won, by Stella's extraordinary beauty and his happiness, to condone the irrevocable step he had taken, but to elope with Stella, implied bringing shame on her who was to be his wife and to bear his name. Could he betray the friend who had protected her so long and so chivalrously, abuse the Prince's hospitality, stain his honour and incur his own condemnation? No, never! He had enough to reproach himself with as it was, the self-deception into which he had fallen, the folly which had induced him to make this visit after he had come to his right mind, and resolved to give up Stella. He had known what Charlotte and the priest's designs were with regard to him, but had believed himself able to withstand them. He had been playing with two-edged tools, and now the danger was imminent.

He alone was guilty. It was his fault that the passion with which he had wrestled and got the better of, had to-day flamed out anew and suffused every fibre of his being with its warm, exquisite glow. But why should Stella be the victim? Could he desert her who believed in him so implicitly, whose hopes were centred in him, whose precious, young love was his? He was plunged in the mad whirlpool in which thoughts, as the Apostle says, excuse and accuse each other, but the whirlpool threatened the woman whom he adored with greater dangers than it did him.

He would have sacrificed his logical faculty, anything, to force himself into a complete and earnest belief. He felt it would do him good to speak to somebody, to make a break in this exasperating tête-à-tête with his bitter self-reproach. He thought of Matteo, the mild, intellectual, experienced old man; but if he went to him now it would not be the genial, urbane, priest of Santa Maria he would have to deal with, but the severe, unbending ecclesiastic, who would look upon the conversion of a heretic as a conscientious duty and as a lasting benefit to the soul of the convert.

When Wilfrid looked back on the past weeks, he could not in all honesty blame the course Matteo had taken. He had done his part with delicacy and caution. He had not wearied him with obscure arguments, but, with his subtle hints and his suave concessions, had led him to a point, which, having reached, he began to reason with himself and weave the golden iridescent threads of the web which encompasses the believer. He must now tear it in twain,—but in doing so he would break Stella's heart and his own.

He must leave Roccaforte instantly, without bidding her farewell. He must explain to Filippo what took him away so hastily. Yes, he must lose his friend, part from Stella for ever, go away to be tortured with the thoughts of her grief, and they would try their best to make her hate and despise him, so that she might forget him and console herself with another man!

The announcement that the Prince and Princess were going to drive out, that the horses for him and Filippo were at the door, roused him from his painful reverie. He collected himself as well as he was able, and in a few minutes had joined the others before the portico.

The restraint which, from his youth upwards, he had been accustomed to put upon himself in society, helped him to master his emotions.

The Princess was already seated in the carriage, Don Salvatore and the priest stood chatting with Filippo, who was on the point of mounting his horse. Wilfrid was astonished at the ease and assurance with which his old chum swung himself into the saddle.

“Per Bacco, Filippo!” he exclaimed, with a gaiety which he was far from feeling, and which sounded hollow to himself, “per Bacco, Filippo! Where did you learn that? I never knew you were a horseman.”

Filippo told him simply that he had been taking lessons from Orlando. But the Prince, who was looking on, not a little pleased, said jestingly, “Oh, you will find out a great many other things our friend can do! He is on the way to becoming as great a cavalier as he is a painter. Indeed he handles a rapier as skilfully as he does a paint-brush, and the part suits him excellently well, as you observe; but now, gentlemen, we must be moving! The Princess is waiting.”

Wilfrid smiled inwardly at the little display of

vanity with which the novice made his horse caper to show how well he could manage it. But he was more impressed with Charlotte's manner. She did not address a single word to Filippo, indeed scarcely looked at him, and it was she who had formerly taken a much deeper interest in him than had the Prince; Peggy's auguries and warnings came into his mind. It was plain that the relations between the Prince and his wife, and between her and Filippo, were not the same as they had been in Rome. Filippo, although he made an effort to appear imperturbable, bore himself with unmistakable pride, and there was a consciousness of victory stamped upon his features of which there had never been a trace before.

Was it possible that this air of triumph could concern Charlotte? And if it was so, what could he do for her in such a situation? What had he to hope or fear from her, for himself and Stella?

As the party passed the steward's house, Marco stood in the doorway with the master and one of his daughters, and two or three workmen were leaning against the wall. The weekly accounts had just been made up, and the wages paid. Marco, who had come up from the valley a few minutes ago, only now

learned that the priest had arrived. He had seen Wilfrid come out of Peggy's rooms on his way to the steward's dwelling.

"Uncle! Welcome, dear uncle!" he shouted, and rushed up to the carriage to try, if possible, to kiss the priest's hand, in order to proclaim to the steward's family and the bystanders his relationship with the man who, as a guest and friend of their Highnesses, sat in the same carriage with them. But they were driving too fast for him to manage it, and he had to be satisfied with a friendly nod and greeting. Although this was sufficient to make him hold his head higher and stick his hat on one side in a swaggering fashion, he was riled more than he would have cared to admit. It always stirred his wrath, when Filippo rode by with the Prince and Princess as if he were God knew what, and not a mere bastard; now as he trotted past him along with the Milordo, who had from the first been a thorn in Marco's side, he felt he hated them both like poison.

"What does the Milordo want here?" he said, attacking Stella, who stood at Peggy's door.

"Ask your uncle! He brought him."

"What was he doing over here just now?"

“Ask Signora Peggy. She’ll tell you if you are so curious to know.”

“What! Is he only here for your sake?”

“Perhaps you don’t know that he is our Princess’s cousin?”

“Pooh! cousin be hanged! Your eyes are sparkling like the villa window panes! Can you deny that you encourage him?”

“Look here!” she retorted, getting impatient, “I go to confession to your uncle, not to you. Go, and leave me alone!”—What had she in common with him, she Wilfredo’s bride elect, who would soon be cousin to a Princess!

She walked into the house. He followed her. “You have played me false!” he cried.

“I play *you* false?” and her blood was up, too, now. “Don’t talk such nonsense. What are you to me? What have I done?”

“You saw,” he went on, “that I wanted you from the first. Out here you have not been so short and snappish with me as you were at home and at your grandmother’s. Filippo has given you up, anyone can see that, and lately you have listened to me and chatted in quite a friendly sort of way.”

“Only because Filippo wished it, and not of my own free will!” broke in Stella.

“Indeed?” scoffed Marco, enraged and exasperated. “Because he wished it? You are very obedient it seems! Very!—and if he wishes you to do something still better for the *cousin of our Princess*, the foreigner, the Milordo, whose throat you jumped down the first day you saw him, you will obey him, won’t you? I can quite believe it! Quite!”

“Impudence!” ejaculated Stella, slamming the door of the room before which they had been standing behind her, as she went in.

Marco stood irresolute in a furious rage. “I’ll remember this of you! And my name is not Marco if I am not even with you yet. I’ll be revenged! See if I am not!” he said menacingly. But she did not hear him, and he turned away stamping, and cursing bitterly.

After the evening meal, when the priest was alone in his room, he sent for Marco. He asked how he was getting on, said, he had heard he was giving satisfaction, and, if he persevered, he had really brilliant prospects before him.

“Look round you!” he said. “On all the Rocca-

forte estates, in Rome and Anciesella, as well as here, the princely retainers stay, multiply and increase, and if you choose, your descendants may be thriving a hundred years hence on the *métairie*, which is to be called the Vigne Carlotta after the Princess; just as the steward's family, the Martelli, are thriving up here now. One of the steward's sons is an advocate, Orlando is an officer, his sisters married rich Campagna proprietors, the daughters are pretty and,"—the priest smiled—"will have large dowries."

"Yes, Signor," Marco replied quickly, emboldened by the priest's praise; "they are fine girls, I have often thought so, and when the *métairie* is ready, cattle, servants and all, which it will be by New Year, I shall not be able to do much there without a wife. If Agnese and Clelia are pretty, Stella is ten times prettier, and you, uncle, yourself, thought of her for me once upon a time. I know you did."

"When you had nothing to do," said the priest.

"There is more reason why I should have her now!" Marco said with a laugh, "then I should have been dependent on her, and the favour would have been on her side. But when I am installed in the Vigne, I shall be a cut above her. Filippo, who plays

the gentleman now with a vengeance, and the old couple in the Piazza, will all be glad in the end to get Stella off their hands, for she is a great responsibility, and mad about the Englishman. I wish, uncle, you had left him behind."

"Hold your peace on matters that do not concern you!" the priest said peremptorily, "it is nothing to you whether the Princess's cousin is here or not. Why do you want a wife who doesn't like you?"

"Why do I want her?" Marco said. "Uncle," he went on more confidently, "you are a pious, upright man, and have been a father to me; I want to act so that you shall not have reason to repent your kindness. But—forgive me for saying it—it is because you *are* pious that you don't understand this. Why do I want the girl?" he snapped his fingers in the air, "because she doesn't like me and has told me so. I will force her to like me and to love me, too, and—pardon, uncle,—but I am the fellow to do it, and she knows that I will have her and marry her just because it's my pleasure."

The priest had let him have his say, but now that he had finished he gave him no answer, which embar-

rassed Marco. He stood looking at his uncle for some minutes. At last he could stand it no longer.

“What do you think, Signore?” he asked in a humbler tone.

“I blush for your barbarity. I hold that men are something better than brutes. To force a woman into love, to marry her by violence that is—for shame! You had better go after that!”

Marco repented that he had gone so far; he did not wish to forfeit his uncle’s good opinion.

“Have you anything more to say?” the priest asked, his eyes fixed steadily upon him.

Marco came nearer to him. “Signore,” he said, “I don’t mean any harm. I spoke to you, only in different words, as I speak to you in the confessional, and there you have never refused me absolution, even when I have been far more guilty than now.”

“Be brief! What do you want?”

Marco twirled his hat on his fingers. “You remember, uncle, I wished to go out into the world. It was you who sent me to Gianbattista and put the idea of setting up housekeeping into my head. You encouraged my hopes about Stella, although you didn’t say so straight out.—Now show that you are my

mother's brother. Reason with the girl! Make it a matter of conscience. You shall see that I mean well by her, and intend to treat her handsomely. Don't go against me! I have good reason to know, Lippo is on my side."

His uncle's affection for him had never been greater than it was this evening. He was sorry for the youth, but at that moment he could do nothing for him. He held out his hand, which Marco kissed reverentially.

"I am sure you mean well, and if Stella gets to like you and becomes your wife, so much the better for you; then you are right, I had her in my mind for you, once, when you were not in the fortunate position you are now. But consider this, a woman who has set her heart on a man, and is driven into wedlock with another against her will, is the curse of her husband and his house, so take care. Pray that the Lord may preserve you from your own selfishness and from such a curse." He made the sign of the cross over him. Marco bowed low and left the room.

CHAPTER X.

THE next morning was clear and bright. It promised to be an excessively hot day, for the sun already blazed upon the landscape, profound stillness reigned in the villa.

Stella had at the Princess's desire gone with the gardener, at an early hour, to the old oratory which opened out of the great hall, and made it gorgeous with flowers. The priest had said Mass there, and later heard the confessions of the Prince and his wife, as well as Filippo's and Stella's; then, after the usual address and absolution, had administered the Holy Sacrament.

He read these people's hearts like an open book. He knew the delicate threads on which they hung together, and his own heart was full of grave apprehension. He felt keenly the difficulties of his calling, the responsibility which the confessional and the task of guiding and helping those who confide in him,

impose upon the Catholic priest. But as in all humility he bowed beneath the will of God, and took all the anxiety and responsibility upon his own shoulders, there rose within him the consciousness that he had acted for the best, that he had ever striven to set the individual on the right road, when it had appeared clear to him what it was. And once more sinking on his knees in silent, solitary prayer, he entreated the Lord to believe his good intentions, and not to judge him now, for his wavering and perplexity. He begged that He who had been the help of this house and its deliverer from great dangers, who had lately showered His favours upon it, would now graciously grant him the power and insight to deal aright with an emergency, to do all for the best, and to the honour and glory of God and the Church. Thus wrapped in prayer, he regained that strength and that confidence and belief in himself which at this moment it was so absolutely essential he should possess.

According to the rubric of the Church, the company did not dine together that day. The Prince and Charlotte retired to their respective apartments to partake of a collation. About an hour later Matteo sought the Prince.

“Her Highness, the Princess, is now, so it seems to me, sufficiently prepared to receive the communications your Highness intends to impart,” he announced with calmness.

“Then I will go to her,” replied the Prince, and left the room.

Charlotte was sitting at her writing-table. She rose when she saw the Prince.

“I am come, my Carlotta,” he said, drawing her down beside him on the sofa, “to continue the talk we began not long ago, to tell you of events which were then entirely unforeseen, although so near—”

He paused and took her hand. It was cold, and trembled in his. Charlotte knew what she was going to hear, and felt keenly for her husband in his difficult task. She was composed and had made up her mind, how she should take what was coming. Her kind heart and sound understanding were at one, and yet she could not rejoice with her husband; the wound in her breast still bled.

“The same Providence,” resumed the Prince, “that led me to you, in whom all my love has since been centred, has given me—”

“Oh!” Charlotte interrupted, “don’t go on, Salva-

tore! I know all! and I thank God for this happiness, for any happiness that He may grant you. But as you say! I possessed you so entirely, you were mine alone, and now I shall share your love, share it with your son—with Josephine's son! Ah, I love him, too. Who could help it? I am glad for your sake, for his happiness, and yet, . . . yet, Salvatore, it is so different from what I had hoped!"

She wept bitterly, with her head on her husband's shoulder. His eyes, too, filled with tears, and he could not speak directly. At last he said: "To what do all our hopes come. But believe me, dearest, and let this comfort you. I have never loved you with a greater and more reverent tenderness than now when your tears are burning into my soul. Your greatness and generosity make me twice as much your own, Carlotta. And Filippo's grateful love! Has it not been yours for a long time?"

They embraced and kissed each other. It was a new and sacred alliance which they closed with each other at that moment, and, entirely forgetful of self, Charlotte was desirous of showing the Prince her readiness to make all easy that might seem to him fraught with difficulty on her account. "How shall

the dear boy be told of his happiness?" she asked, drying her tears.

"Before we decide that, Carlotta mine, there are other matters on which it will be well to understand each other." He was silent a moment, then went on: "Heaven has denied us the heir I longed for from you. If I succeed, as I have every hope I may, in obtaining legal evidence to establish the fact of Filippo's being the Countess's offspring, when I acknowledge him as my son and he holds that position before the world,—how would it be if then that other blessing were at last granted us, if you bore me a son? Could you endure that the Countess's son should take precedence of your son, to see him recognized as the representative and head of the house of Roccaforte, while your son would only bear the title of Marchese of Anciesella, and as the younger son would have smaller possessions than the son of the Countess?"

And again love for her husband, and the proud consciousness of being born a rich woman, came to Charlotte's aid. She drew herself up, her brow had cleared, and gazing unfalteringly into her husband's eyes, which were fixed on her full of anxious tenderness, she said:

“I should have loved you, you would have been my choice, Salvatore, if I had first met you and known you as a widower, Josephine’s widower, with Filippo, your son, at your side! Is it different now? And if God does fulfil my dearest wish, if He bestows on me that highest happiness, the *only* thing I do not possess, a son, well, then he will bear the title of Marchese of Anciesella proudly, and will consider himself rich enough in possessing the inheritance of his mother’s house.”

“Then there is no more to be said, you noble, generous soul!” cried the Prince, and rang the bell.

“You will summon Filippo?”

“No,” replied the Prince. “A man is better left to himself when he learns such a complete transformation of his circumstances, when with one step he comes out of darkness into daylight. And,” he added, “on the first meeting of father and son the father should not have any painful confession of guilt to make to the son, the son should not stand before the father confused and mute.” He drew a letter out of his pocket and handed it to the servant who entered.

“Take this letter to Signor Filippo,” he said, “and

tell him I desire him to come to me here when he has read it.”

“I have written,” he said after the servant had retired, “all that I told you the other day. I have still to communicate to you what has passed between myself and Filippo since then. You must know all the priest and I have discussed, and the steps I have taken, and propose to take to bring about Filippo’s recognition, and introduction in society as my son.”

The Princess, on her side, had thought often enough in the last few days how this news would be received in the social world, and by her aunt, Lady Jane. The two strongest emotions of her heart, love for her husband and deep dislike for her aunt, had tossed her hither and thither. She had no doubt as to what it was incumbent on her to do at this crisis. She knew that she was protected by her husband’s love, knew that the esteem which they enjoyed, the name they bore, and the mildness and tolerance of the Italian mind, would be in their favour, that Filippo’s introduction would meet with few obstacles. Notwithstanding, the twenty-five years which had trained her in implicit obedience to the canons of her native London

society kept her under its jurisdiction even at a distance; while she had been able to put her own pain aside and to enter into her husband's joy, she could not help surmising what would be thought in London, what Lady Jane would say, whose stern, implacable nature had no sympathy with the errors of amorous hearts, who had never known the conflict between love, and the laws of the Church and morality.

Last night she had in her dreams, seen the woman she had once loved and whose virtue she had respected, looking at her with her serious eyes and a cold smile on her thin lips. She had heard her say: "Is this why you exiled yourself from your country and fell away from your Church, to take upon you the consequences of your husband's youthful escapades, to play the part of mother to another woman's son; and when your husband's eyes are closed, to submit tamely to this son as head of the family by whose nobility you set so much store? Was there no countryman of your own, a member of our Church, who could have offered you rank and name as well as he?"

The dream had haunted her when she awoke, and it was not without an effort that she had

shaken off the unpleasant impression it had left behind it. After confession the priest had done his utmost to fortify her in herself, had directed her to appeal to conscience, that tribunal which God sets in every human breast, and to her love. She had acted on his advice. But the almost feverish desire to make that icy smile of Lady Jane's an impossibility, seized her with redoubled force, now in this hour when she and her husband awaited the entrance of his son, who would be the cause of so many and great changes in their future.

The Prince, to all appearance calm and collected, still sat on the sofa which faced the open doors, commanding a view of the whole vista of apartments beyond. The least sound made him look up quickly and eagerly, and then bend his eyes on the Princess again.

They both felt the necessity of speaking, to prevent this expectant stillness becoming oppressive. The Prince asked Charlotte if she had any wish or suggestion to make with regard to Filippo's presentation.

She proposed that they should go abroad with

him, to France or one of the large German watering-places where they might stay till he was initiated in his new circumstances, and then return to the palazzo Roccaforte, in order to introduce him to their circle of acquaintances in Rome.

The Prince shook his head. In his opinion it was not wise to wait till next winter, which would be giving time for rumours to spread and providing food for gossip. "The road you suggest is too long and not direct enough," he said; "when a man is going to do something which will be remarked upon, that he knows he has a right to do, he ought to be bold and decided, for it is easier to win people to our way of thinking by prompt action, than to convince them by talking and persuasion. An accomplished fact is of great weight."

"Then you will acknowledge him here to-day as your heir?"

"Yes, but not by an open declaration, only privately. Perhaps it will be advisable to wait till the election of the Pope, which cannot be far off now, to make the news public. In the midst of great political changes, which affect the whole world, the vicissitudes of indivi-

duals attract less consideration than they would otherwise. A new reign brings new men to the front, and one among many strangers is not noticed. The future Pope, whoever he may be, shall be the first person to whom I present Filippo, so that he shall start with the Holy Father's blessing and favour. My son—"

It was the first time he had called Filippo this before Charlotte. "My son," he repeated, getting up, for at that moment Filippo was visible in the doorway of the third room. He came quickly forwards, and, unable to master himself, prostrated himself before the Prince, whose arms were held out to receive him. The Prince raised him. "Not at my feet," he said in a tremulous voice, and taking Charlotte's hand, who had drawn near, not less moved than the other two, he, continued: "This is your place between her and me whose great unselfish love makes you welcome in the house of your fathers,—our fathers!"

"Oh, my father," cried Filippo bewildered, and overwhelmed with the prospect of his happiness, hardly believing his ears when he heard these words from such honoured lips. "My father!" he repeated, as if he wished to accustom himself to the sound of this musical word so unfamiliar to him. "Ah, my

most gracious and good Princess!—teach me to comprehend it, tell me that it is all real, not a dream that will melt away.”

Charlotte pressed his hand affectionately. “No, Filippo,” she said, “this is not a dream but a reality, which, let us hope, is to bring many golden years to us all; for what won’t you do now to give the Prince pleasure, and how much more zealously you will work at our picture now that it is to adorn the chapel of your paternal home.”

With loving sympathy, and graceful tact she had made these last remarks; for the overstrained excitement of the moment must be brought down to the level of every day life, they needed time to contemplate each other calmly, to familiarize themselves with the new state of things and to make it harmonize with the old.

Charlotte’s gentle playfulness and calm way of taking it all as a matter of course were a great help to the Prince and Filippo. She asked if the priest should be called, and who should tell the news to Stella and Wilfrid. She wanted to know if Filippo had suspected, what was in store for him, and if so, how long. She begged him to say openly and honestly

anything he wished; to keep nothing from them. He obeyed, and soon became calmer and more at his ease.

The Prince kissed his wife's hand full of gratitude. His happiness, and his tenderness for her, made her heart go out to his son. To all three the time passed quickly. Then the Prince decided that Charlotte should see her cousin on the subject at once, that Filippo should talk with the Prince and then go to Stella.

At the mention of Stella's name Filippo turned to the Prince. "My father," he said, and again his heart swelled with exultation as he pronounced those words. "My dearest father! If a son may ask favours of his father, I will beg one of you now." He hesitated a moment, then went on: "I owe Stella all my good fortune. Her father took me in when—when I had nobody in the world to care for me. Stella was a legacy to me from her mother, and she is as precious to me as a sister. In the house where the master calls me son, Stella cannot remain a servant."

"Certainly not, my son!" was the Prince's hearty rejoinder. "The Prince of Roccaforte will repay Giambattista's kindness to the utmost of his power. Stella

belongs to you. What is the best to be done for her I will leave for the dear wife to decide who, without our instigation, took her under her patronage and protection. In her loving hands she will be perfectly secure."

CHAPTER XI.

THE young Prince had spoken for everybody when he asked whether what had passed was not all a dream. No one exactly understood what he saw and heard; what had happened, and was still to happen.

In the corridors the domestics stood about in groups whispering, and looking cautiously around them. The news had reached the kitchen. At the Steward's it formed the sole topic of conversation. They all repeated at once what they had heard from the servants, which was reliable information, because the priest had corroborated it. One servant had heard the Prince call the painter, "thou", and "my son." Another was present when the priest, who had always addressed the painter in the second person singular, called him "you" and Signore, and when Filippo had protested, Prince Salvatore had told him not to contradict Don Matteo when he addressed him with the respect due to his rank.

The Princess's lady's maid related how her Highness had been talking English for hours with Peggy that afternoon, how Peggy had wrung her hands and groaned and cried till the tears poured from her, like water out of a Triton's mouth. She admitted that she enjoyed the joke of seeing Peggy so taken aback. Peggy, the all knowing, had not suspected a word of this, and she went on to say that the new young Prince was a nice-looking, pleasant Signor.

The Steward was the first to divine the real truth of the matter. In his time he had heard in the villa of Roccaforte, as well as in Rome, of strange things that had taken place in Lucca and Anciesella, had had his own opinion, and put his own interpretations on the affair, and said now with a wise shake of the head: "It will all come out at last."

"And, after all," he added, "what concern is it of ours. It's not to our disadvantage! It is the master's affair, and he'll make it all right; there have always been plenty of indulgences and absolution for great people, and they won't be wanting in this case, I know."

"It's nothing new," Orlando interposed. "That's why they were in such a hurry with the chapel, which

brought them the indulgence, and that's why they fixed on Filippo to paint their pictures. You may depend upon it, they've known it for a long time! I for my part haven't a doubt that they have."

"But all the same it's a bitter pill for her Highness, the Princess, to swallow," his mother reflected.

"Aye!" exclaimed the Steward, "why has she no children! Englishwomen and Germans generally get them by dozens! The Prince will soon have waited six years; and isn't that long enough? The Prince is getting on. He's no longer a boy. Are the Roccafortes to die out because a foreign Princess chooses to have no children?"

His wife shook her head. "She is a good pious woman, and a real lady. It's not her will. It makes her miserable, just as it does everyone in a like case, high or low!"

"And you would be miserable too," her husband interrupted her, "if you were told one of these days that Prince Salvatore was dead, that the estate was to be bought by strangers, and that the old, honest family of Martelli, who have been here for two hundred years and served the Roccafortes so as to win their respect and esteem, have to take themselves off; for there's

not a doubt that Signora Francesca, with her sons and daughters, and sons-in-law, would have to go elsewhere then."

He had spoken warmly, and the others had nothing to say.

"No," he went on, "Don Salvatore has done rightly and acted like the astute and wise man that he is. I may be sorry for the Princess, but God never intended foreign blood to reign here in Roccaforte or in Anciesella or in any other castle. A Prince has not only himself to think of, there are other considerations, his position in the world and suchlike. He has every right to receive and acknowledge his son. Now the Martelli will serve the house of Roccaforte for more centuries. Prince Filippo," he pronounced the name magnificently, "Prince Filippo won't forget that Domenico Martelli received him and treated him like a Signor when he was nothing but a painter; for Prince Filippo is a Roccaforte from the crown of his head to the soles of his feet. All the Roccafortes value faithful service. He is a fine young man, worthy of them in every respect!"

"Who denied it," the married daughter rejoined.

"I always said he was like our master! And you all laughed at me."

"He is quite at ease with them too," Orlando said, "he is simple and polite, and has the manners of a nobleman born in him. What he learnt of me in a month was astonishing. With a little more practice he will be as perfect a horseman as you could wish to see."

"They will be making a Princess of Stella too, before they've done," laughed the youngest daughter.

"She is pretty enough anyhow," replied Orlando, and his married sister put in sharply: "Just the right wife for you—the Prince's adopted sister, eh?"

"Don't let Marco hear you say that," the youngest girl said in a warning tone.

"Not a word of Marco, please," the mother commanded. "Stella is too good for him and has never cared a bit for him. But where are Peggy and the girl? It has struck six, and I have never known them not punctual before."

A servant from the villa interrupted the Stewardess. "I am to say that dinner is to be served in Mrs. Peggy's room, only a cup of soup for the old lady, because her stomach is out of order and she complains

of headache, but the whole bill of fare for the Signorina if you please," he said, his eyes twinkling.

"What Signorina?" they asked all at once.

"The Signorina Stella!" the servant answered with a smile which everyone understood. The Princess had thus arranged matters, to defend Stella and her old waiting-woman from embarrassing questions and remarks. Of course no one had any objections to make, and the party went to table in silence. Only the Steward observed: "What does it concern us what they please to do? The great point is that the Martelli will remain here for the future, as it is only right they should."

Meanwhile Filippo had gone to tell his Stella all that had happened, the whole story of his unexpected happiness and good fortune.

Quietly, with folded hands, she listened to him now, just as she had sat on his knee when she was a small child to hear his tales about the saints which he and Gianbattista ornamented in the chapels, and whose pictures he afterwards drew and painted. He poured into her ears all that was in his heart: the anticipations of an almost incredible future, the great overwhelming joy of having found a father, and such a

father! When he had finished she did not say a single word. He could not understand her silence.

"Aren't you pleased, aren't you glad for your Lippo? Or don't you believe me?"

"Yes! oh yes!" she cried, rousing herself. "I believe you, and they weren't stupid to call you the Santo. The Blessed Virgin has worked a miracle for you, because you always have painted her so beautifully. . . . But," and she looked at him sorrowfully, "tell me what good it does me? Prince Filippo is not my Lippo, and—and—"

He did what he could to comfort her. He told her she was still and always would be his Stella, that he and his father and the good Princess would never forget that he owed everything to her, but he saw that she hardly heeded him.

Suddenly she kindled up. "Listen," she exclaimed, "you have been frank and confided in me; now I will confide in you, and *he* will forgive me, for I can't help it, because it will break my heart and drive me out of my mind, if you don't help me."

"Speak, for God's sake," cried Filippo. "What is the matter?"

"You know," she said, "I have loved him ever

since I set eyes on him. God put it into my heart, I could not prevent it; you warned me, and the priest told me that I must pray our Saviour to help me to get rid of this love. And I did pray, but our Saviour didn't hear me."—She stopped to take breath. "And then the Princess, who is your mother now, came to Nilo's studio, and said I was a good girl and must pray to the Madonna for Wilfredo's conversion, and I prayed again day and night, but even then the Blessed Mother wouldn't listen, and Peggy told me his mother would hate and abhor me if she knew of my shameful prayer. *Shameful*, yes she called my prayer shameful!" Her excitement made her speechless again. Filippo was going to speak, but she laid her hand on his mouth.

"No!" she cried, "let me go on, I must! So I was nearly mad. I wanted to pray, but didn't know what or how to pray. I hardly knew what to make of myself, and if I laughed and joked with you I felt more like crying than laughing. Then he came yesterday as you know, and to *me!*—I flung my arms round his neck, and we kissed each other; he said he loved me, and I thanked God because I thought he was con-

verted; I didn't tell you yesterday, for he forbade me to do so. So I told nobody. But Peggy saw it, and to-day the priest, when I asked him—" She sobbed loudly, and exclaimed piteously: "Poor me! ah! poor unhappy me! What will become of me?"

"What did the priest say that was so dreadful, my poor child?"

"He said," moaned Stella, "it was all untrue, Wilfrid didn't love me, because he hadn't been converted; and that if I didn't want to be disgraced I must not see him again, and must go up to the nuns on the hills to-day. Yes, to-day, and he would ask the Princess to send me there."

"Poor child, poor Stella!" sympathised Filippo. But with this pity there arose in his breast the proud delight of being a Prince's son, he belonged now to the influential and powerful, his word would be of weight. He stood alone no longer, he had his father to take his side, and the Princess, the distinguished Englishman's still more aristocratic and near relation. He could plead for Stella, he had a double right to do so. It was his duty to point out to Wilfrid that, as he had not kept his passion within bounds, but excited

hopes in the poor girl's bosom, the most honourable course he could take, was to fulfil them. The priest could not deal so harshly with one who was guiltless. Stella should not be forced into a convent against her will.

"Calm yourself, Stella!" he said, "you have still me to trust to! I will see that you don't go to the nuns; Wilfrid shall go away rather than that!"

"No, no!" she exclaimed, "not Wilfrid! How can I live without him, now that I have felt his arms round me, and know what it is to have his love?"

While they were talking thus Peggy, entered the room, as she had done the day before, and came between them. Her face was rigid, her voice hard and cold. She looked beyond Filippo as she said:

"Pardon, Don Filippo! Highness! if I am disturbing you. I have a message for Stella, which I will deliver at once. She is to pack her things."

"Pack my things?" asked Stella, "where am I going then?" and in her fear that it might be really true about the convent, she involuntarily caught hold of Filippo's hand.

Peggy smiled grimly, not her kind motherly smile.

"Yes!" she said, "You know what you are about. You have got a grand protector in Prince Filippo!"

"Say a brother, Peggy! and kind protectors in the Princess and my father!" Filippo corrected her in quiet, dignified tones, for his nature, so nearly akin to his father's, quickly accustomed itself to command.

Peggy, on the other hand, could not forget his circumstances hitherto, so easily as he, or drop directly into the new order of things, as she told herself she ought to do. "That's right!" she exclaimed, "quite right of you Highness; I am pleased that you have the sense not to call Lady Charlotte your mother, although she has instructed me to respect you as her son (which you certainly are not), and bidden me treat Stella as if she were a fine guest in this house. And it's to be all over with those theatrical clothes."

"All over, Signora Peggy? But I haven't got any others!" broke in Stella anxiously, for the idea of the convent still made her uneasy.

"They will give you some when you take up your abode in your own room, which you are to have all to yourself; you are to put on the white dress with the blue sash, for to-day which you wore when you

dressed up as an angel. You understand such things, so make it look as much like a decent garment as possible; then this evening you are to have the honour of making tea for their Highnesses, after dinner."

"I?" cried Stella, "make tea at their table and—"

She stopped, and Filippo's presence made Peggy suppress what it was in her heart to say; she sighed heavily. "It's a lucky thing," she said, "that you have at least learnt from me civilized ways."

Stella looked appealingly at Filippo. "What shall I do?" she asked him, "the priest forbade me!"

"You shall do what the Princess desires of you, my Stella! I will come this evening to see how you have managed your dress and take you across with me. But," he added in a low voice, "you must behave reasonably if Wilfrid is there. Keep by me and only speak in answer to questions; above all, don't betray Wilfrid and yourself. Cheer up; only a few months ago I sat at the Prince's table for the first time."

"Yes, you! you are a Prince!" replied Stella.

"Did I know it then?" he answered her merrily. "Au revoir! au revoir, good old Peggy! Get

used to my happiness. It doesn't injure yours' you know. Not in the least! Remember that!"

This half jesting, half haughty manner, suited him admirably. Peggy looked after him, shaking her head. "It's in the blood!" she said, and began to think she really could honour him as a Prince and a Prince's son, as her lady had desired and commanded.

CHAPTER XIV.

THERE had been an incessant coming and going the whole afternoon in Charlotte's and the Prince's apartments. Don Salvatore, in spite of the calm exterior he was accustomed to wear under all circumstances, however exciting, could not conceal the joy he felt in his new-found son. He was eager to compensate himself and him for the love of which untoward events had deprived them for so many years, to put every kind of knowledge and worldly advantage in his son's way which it had been impossible for him to enjoy hitherto. He formed numerous plans for the future, and talked them over with the priest. He had always been reluctant to renounce the hope of his children and grand-children keeping up the family name, and the family honour, and now already he racked his brains to think of marriageable daughters of other noble houses, from whose ranks Filippo might one day select a wife.

So, busily engaged with the prospects of one for whom life was just beginning, he felt new youth and hopes dawning for himself, and saw a golden future still before him.

What with his happiness, and the impatience with which he awaited the result of the inquiries in Rome, he did not think much of Charlotte's schemes and wishes for her cousin, but he was by no means averse to them. He was attached to his Church, and thought Charlotte, who was happy under its protection, perfectly justified in cooperating with the priest for the attainment of such an object as the conversion of an unbeliever. The motive which the Princess united with this good intention she had thought best not to communicate to him; he would rather Stella was removed from his son's neighbourhood, that he should be relieved from the responsibility of being her guardian. A union between Wilfrid and Stella seemed to him practicable enough, considering their mutual passion. If he, the Prince of Roccaforte, could marry the beautiful daughter of an English merchant, why should there be any hesitation about Wilfrid, who did not belong to the nobility, making a bourgeois Roman maiden of stainless character and rare love-

liness his wife? He gave this as his opinion the first time he found himself alone with Charlotte and the chaplain, and pointed out that, abroad, intermarriage between Catholics and Protestants was permissible.

“Don’t ask for the whole hand when you are offered a finger; but hold fast as much as you have got, and the hand will yield at last,” he said to the priest. “He who asks too much is more easily repulsed than he who is moderate in his demands. Our Church has ever understood the wisdom of waiting. Rome and the Church were neither of them built in a day. Make the most of what is offered you, and wait for the rest.”

But the priest was too zealous, and Charlotte too impatient, to listen to this argument. They both believed that Wilfrid was half converted, and that a little pressure would put an end to his vacillation. The Prince warned them not to take this course.

“Force will do no good, it will only cause him to remain undecided,” he said, “or incite him to look back and reconsider; one should not oppose him, but guide him gradually and imperceptibly to the spot which is safest—and then await the result!”

The Princess had still before her the task of imparting to Wilfrid the events of the day; she hoped by this interview, if not to urge him to a determination, at least to gain some clear and definite idea of his spiritual state, and to sound the depths of his soul. After the priest had been prevailed upon to give his permission to Stella's appearance at the tea-table that evening, the three separated, and the Princess sent for Wilfrid.

Meanwhile Filippo was holding council with himself. He was really more anxious than he had wished to appear to Stella. Her love for his friend, his stepmother's cousin, who was now a guest in his father's house, had always been a care to him, it seemed to him now more than ever a matter for serious thought.

Alone in the world, as he had hitherto been, he had felt free to act independently of others. His relations to his friends had been simple and untrammelled. Since Stella had refused his overtures, and conceived a passion for Wilfrid, he had acted for her good to the best of his ability, and had intentionally avoided mentioning Stella to his friend, who, on his part, had maintained a reserved silence

on the subject. All that had concerned him in this, as in everything else up to this moment, had been his affair and his alone. He had had to render an account of himself to no one but God and his own conscience.

But, as a Prince's son, belonging to a renowned and ancient house, he had not himself alone to answer for. There were others to think of, others for whose sake he must respect his position. It was enough that the Prince had declared himself willing to interest himself in Stella for his sake; Gianbattista's daughter must not be the source of any unpleasantness to him; and he felt a delicacy about going to his father again to-day to trouble him with questions, and to beg favours for Stella.

He would go to the Princess and ask her advice. It was she who had removed Stella from her home and brought her into her house. She had spoken to him of the girl's love for Wilfrid of her own accord, his father had entrusted Stella's future to her; he owed her much, and he would now rely on her insight and experience, show his gratitude to her for the generous kindness with which she had received him, when his father had laid his hand in hers, by

giving her his entire confidence. He knew the extent of the sacrifice she must have made to receive him as she did. But how would this be thanking her?

Would she appreciate being called upon to take to task her cousin, the companion of her youth, to urge him to leave her house for the sake of a foreign girl, whom the priest, with his sagacious foresight, would have hidden in a convent, secure from the dangers and temptations of the world.

He shuddered when he thought of Stella with her bright, sunny optimism, her warm, young heart, her joy in light and air, in ornament and colour, confined between the walls of a cloister, her lithe form swathed in the heavy dark draperies of a nun's habit. His Stella, the original of his pictures, his ideal of all that was beautiful in woman! No, this should not be her fate, Stella must not be sacrificed. Wilfrid himself would not wish that. He had always found Wilfrid honourable, he had often been the model after which he had tried to mould himself. If Stella was to go on enjoying life, and if their friendship was to continue, they must have it out together, of this he felt convinced.

His position was a peculiar one. He was the

same as he had always been, and yet how different! For months he had lived in this lovely retreat in respectful, but familiar intercourse with these genial, cultured people, and now suddenly his relations to them were completely changed. He felt almost overpowered with the strangeness of the whole situation, but his good conscience, his sense of honour, his artist-nature, prevented him from losing his head, and made him feel he could deal justly and calmly with his friend.

Unlike Wilfrid, life had not been a bed of roses for him from his cradle, there had been no one to cut out, and make smooth his road in the world. He had had to think for himself, and strive upwards alone. He had risen by his own talents and his own energies. In work and privation he had learnt self-respect. It was not as one in great need, or a seeker for patronage, that he had found his way into his father's house, but he had been sought and chosen, his powers put to the proof, and acknowledged. He brought his pedigree something, with himself. To the long line of honourable names he added his own of artistic distinction, which now that other possibilities were open to him for his further development

would become still more celebrated. But first he would have to acquaint himself with his new world, and learn the limits to the freedom that he would enjoy, and the extent of the restrictions that would be imposed upon him, in it.

He thought over this as he walked to Wilfrid's room; if as a painter he had considered himself not only equal to, but above his friend, he had never forgotten that Wilfrid was the richer, more cultivated and influential of the two. Now the position was reversed, and Filippo was conscious how much tact and caution would be necessary on his part in the interview that he was about to seek.

He knocked at his friend's door. Wilfrid had just returned to his apartment after a long conversation with the Princess. He had learnt Filippo's present circumstances, and the news naturally amazed him. Charlotte's and the Prince's conduct to each other was now cleared up to his intense relief; but the *tête-à-tête* had not affected Wilfrid as the Princess had hoped. They had separated under a painful constraint; and Charlotte sat alone, disappointment rankling in her breast, but still making plans and weighing possibilities, while Wilfrid paced his room

in the saddest and most dejected frame of mind. When Filippo came in he roused himself, and went quickly to meet him, generously rejoicing at the happiness of another in spite of his own misery.

“I congratulate you with all my heart,” he exclaimed, “and wish you all prosperity; may your future be as happy as this bright, red letter day in your life, which for me is one of the gloomiest and saddest of my own,” he added in a low desponding tone, “for we must part.”

Filippo had not expected this sudden declaration, but he collected himself quickly. “You are going to leave us?” he inquired.

“To-morrow—never to come back, but I leave my heart here for evermore!”

“Thank God that you propose to do what I came with a heavy heart to ask of you. But this is like you!” he said.

They stood in silence for some moments, till Wilfrid’s overwrought feelings would permit him to speak. “You must try not to blame me, as I take this step of my own free will. Till yesterday my conscience was clear. But I ought never to have trusted myself to

come, never to have allowed myself to be persuaded. Ah, if you knew how my whole soul clings to her!"

He turned away to hide his deep emotion from his friend. "Poor Wilfrid, poor Stella," murmured Filippo.

"Don't mention her name!" exclaimed Wilfrid, throwing himself into a chair. He crossed his arms on the table and buried his head in them. But his excitement would not let him rest. He rose and once more strode up and down the room, speaking hastily and disjointedly, contrary to his wont. "If I only could do it! If I could take the vows of her Church for her sake. But who can live a lie without despising himself? You have found your father to-day; for the first time he has called you son and you have called him father! Think: how would you like to break his heart, to renounce him?"

His question found its echo and its answer in Filippo's breast. He gave Wilfrid his hand, which the latter grasped firmly in his own.

"Ah, Filippo," he exclaimed, "may Heaven preserve you from the fate of choosing between your happiness and your conscience, from the misery of causing the unhappiness of the creature you love; and

don't think too badly of me. I am wretched enough!" Filippo laid his hand on his shoulder, and Wilfrid leant his head against his friend's arm.

At that moment the sound of a postillion's horn broke the stillness. The clatter of rapidly approaching hoofs was audible. The next minute a man on horse-back drew up before the portico. Every one guessed what this portended, and the Prince and Princess knew directly.

The new Pope was chosen!—The people left their work and hurried from the farm buildings, the gardens and every quarter of the estate: men and women, old and young, were all on the alert to hear the name of the man whom the Cardinals with the assistance of the Holy Ghost had appointed to be ruler of Christendom and representative of Christ on earth.

"Take courage, dear friend," said Filippo with a warm shake of the hand, as they prepared to join in the general excitement. "Who can tell what the coming days may bring. Do the right and await the best! 'Aspire and hope,' as the motto on our-coat-of-arms says," he added proudly.

Wilfrid had no answer to make to this. What had he to strive or hope for?—and the cry of Pio nono,

which greeted them from all sides as soon as they joined the others, put an end to any further conversation.

The people still pressed round the postillion on the terrace, to hear, if possible, further particulars. The Prince, in his study, was perusing the missive which one of the Cardinals, a friend of his, had sent in fulfilment of a promise, immediately the result of the election was known, to the majordomo of the Roman Palace, who had received instructions beforehand to despatch the news forthwith, by a courier, to the Villa Roccaforte.

An expression of intense satisfaction passed over the Prince's features as he read the name of the elected. The note only contained these words: "Cardinal Giovanni Maria Mastai Ferretti has accepted the triple crown as Pope Pius IX., has received the adoration of his Cardinals, and has taken up his residence in the Vatican. Praise the Lord! His blessings be on His Holiness and us all!"

The families of Mastai Ferretti and Roccaforte had been for many years connected by marriage, the Prince had had manifold dealings with the Cardinal. He valued the purity and uprightness of his character,

and as his elevation promised to benefit the whole of Italy, the Prince built much on the new Pope's private affection for himself.

He looked at the clock, and saw that it was nearly seven. "It is too late to-day," said he, "but to-morrow early we will go to Rome. You, Matteo, are of course obliged to return. I too am anxious to express to His Holiness my pleasure at his elevation as soon as possible, and I should like the Princess to witness some of the great ceremonials. You, Filippo, shall accompany me and Don Matteo to-morrow; and you, my friend," he added turning to Wilfrid, "will, I daresay, be kind enough to escort the Princess to Rome a little later."

Wilfrid expressed himself ready to do so, while the others bowed their assent. The great historical event had come opportunely, and helped them all out of what had been a very trying and critical situation.

If the whole princely family repaired to the city, as a matter of course, Wilfrid would accompany them; his going away would thus be explained to Stella, and the suspense would be at an end. Now this trouble seemed to be clearing up, Filippo's face wore a brighter expression.

Everything seemed to be turning out as it ought. He would not lose his friend after all, he could continue his esteem for him, could pity him, and, perhaps, give him comfort. The danger of Stella's going into a convent seemed for the present averted. His love and sympathy must succeed in consoling her at last; and surely she would find happiness and new love if she lived in his house under the Princess's motherly protection. His own great happiness made him confident of the happiness of others: he wanted to enjoy his position now to the full, to anticipate undisturbed the blissful and solemn moment when he would stand by his illustrious father's side, and be received and blessed by the Pope as Prince Filippo of Roccaforte.

CHAPTER XV.

THE bell had sounded for dinner, the conversation at table naturally turned on the new Pope. It was carried on almost entirely by the Prince and Don Matteo. The Pope's manner of life hitherto, his inclinations and disinclinations were discussed, and it was conjectured whom he would appoint to serve him, which of his officers he would probably remove, and in what direction his ecclesiastical and secular politics would lean. It was clear that the Prince, as well as the priest, had distinctly personal objects in view with regard to the new reign. Filippo and the Princess followed all that the others said with the deepest interest, Wilfrid on the other hand scarcely heard a word, but no one seemed to notice his abstraction.

The dinner had been later than usual, and the party had remained at the table longer than was their custom, so that the sun had sunk in the heavens more than an hour when they left the hall for the verandah.

Here, on fine evenings, the Princess repaired with her guests to chat after dinner and to drink tea. It was already dark under the shadowy, leafy roof of the verandah. Torches burned at the upper end, where the table stood with the tea-things. They illuminated Stella, who, in obedience to the orders she had received, presided there. The excitement caused by the news of the papal election, and the proposed journey to Rome the next day, had put Stella out of her mistress's head. At the present moment she had no very friendly feelings towards her, for the failure of her scheme for Wilfrid made her a little out of temper with poor Stella.

As if surrounded by an aureole, the girl's beautiful figure clothed in the white dress and blue scarf, stood out against the dark green background. She looked like the angel in the Annunciation.

Filippo saw how, with a violent effort, Stella managed to stand quietly in her place, while Wilfrid started and grew pale at the sight of her. He stepped up to her simultaneously with the Prince, who wished to take some notice of the girl to please his son.

"Well, my child," he said with smiling condescension, "so you are going to show us how you can make tea. I am glad that you have come this

evening to do it, for to-morrow, as I daresay you have heard, we are going to Rome."

"To Rome?" she asked and her eyes anxiously sought Wilfrid.

"We are going to see the new Pope," interposed Filippo, who understood her glance and wished to divert her.

"That is very nice for you," she said, while she applied herself to the business of pouring out tea.

"Do you envy the Prince?" asked Don Salvatore, purposely calling his son by his title to his foster-sister. "You would like to look at the Holy Father too?"

She shrugged her shoulders almost imperceptibly. "I should like it, yes!—but are you all going, your Highness?"

"For a few days," said Filippo quickly. "Isn't it so, father, we shall come back soon?"

"Probably, my son," answered the Prince, and then he went back to where the others were sitting. Filippo followed him, and Stella remained standing behind her table.

She had imagined it would all be so different. A great joy and happiness, a surprise and recognition,

such as had fallen to Filippo's lot, she had promised herself, too, on this day of wonders. She had thought Wilfrid would present her to the Princess as his betrothed, that the Princess would embrace her as the Prince had embraced his Lippo; but now Wilfrid sat apart, without so much as looking at her. He did not move from his seat, he did not come to her, and yet she was his promised bride. He did not lead her to the Princess, and the Princess who had always from the first day been so kind and friendly to her, and treated her almost like a daughter, now had not a word to say to her, and she might not have been there at all, performing her new duty, which Peggy had taught her so well, for all the notice the Princess took of her.

Stella was not given to any deep thought, nor did she ever carefully consider matters. To see Wilfrid there and not to be able to go to him, was acute anguish to her. She would have liked to call him by name, but dared not do so; or if she could only have gone to Filippo! But that was impossible; for he was sitting with the others sipping his tea, just as if there was no such person as herself in the world, or on the terrace where she had been ordered to come. Every moment

increased her uneasiness. She stared before her so fixedly that she began to feel as if she, Wilfrid, and Lippo were all bewitched. She would have crossed herself; only as she raised her hand to do so, she caught the priest's eye, who was gazing earnestly at her, and remembered that he had forbidden her to go near Wilfrid again; this recollection made her quite wild, she lost her presence of mind, and called out:

"Lippo!" They all turned round to look at her, and Wilfrid sprang up from his seat.

"Do you want anything?" Filippo asked, coming towards her.

"Yes," she said, when he was beside her, "I want to know if I may go, I can't endure this any longer."

"I will ask the Princess," he replied. Charlotte rose and came over to her; she told her she had done her part very well, that no one wanted more tea, and that she might go.

Filippo remained standing by her when the Princess went back to her seat. He watched her put the things together, lock the tea caddy and extinguish the spirit lamp, and when she was ready he left the verandah with her, but scarcely were they out of hearing before she burst out vehemently. "What have you done to

him, that my beloved doesn't know me now? What have you said to him, to make him not speak to *me*, who am to be his bride? Tell him, do you hear, that I *will* speak to him, that he must come now and let me speak to him, instantly!"

Filippo was silent. He stood almost cowed before the power of this great unbroken love, love which will acknowledge nothing but itself and its own rights; Wilfrid and himself and everybody else, with their plans and motives, seemed to him at this moment poor, pitiable and insignificant when compared with this girl's bold assertion of her claim on her lover! It was impossible for him to lie to her.

"Stella," he said, "Wilfrid is not better off than you are. He is quite as unhappy. He cannot come, he cannot do what he would fain do!"

"But I must do what *I* wish," she cried. "I have no one to be afraid of, I have no father or mother, and not you now, for what concern am I of a Prince's, and what do I care for a Prince? As little as the old people on the Piazza care for me or I for them. I am quite alone."

Filippo knew from experience what desolation these words meant. And his whole soul rose to his lips

in the exclamation: "You are unhappy, but you do me a bitter injustice—you are not alone!"

"Injustice or no," she broke out again, "it is all the same. I *will* speak to him and to-day too. And if you lock me up—for you won't let him come to me, or let me go to him; Peggy and the priest have set you against me too—Ah! if you lock me up—"

She was beside herself and could not go on. He did not know what to do with her. She walked by his side speechless, and sobbing violently, when they came upon Marco. To Filippo the meeting was an extremely inopportune one, but Marco thought it could not have happened more conveniently.

The news of the Pope's election had spread like wildfire through the neighbourhood, and had brought Marco from his task of surveying, earlier than usual to the villa. At the same time, with the confirmation of this fact, he had learnt the intelligence which concerned the retainers of the villa far more closely, and in which they took even a more lively interest, than in the new Pope! All Marco's passions were awakened; his vanity, his ambition, his love and his hatred, which were so nearly allied to one another in his unruly breast.

It flashed across him in a moment that he would have from henceforth to honour the painter as his future master, whose superiority he had already considered it good policy reluctantly to acknowledge, and that Stella, through her connection with the new Prince, would be still further removed from him and brought nearer to Wilfrid. It was with Filippo that he felt most angry, although he had treated him invariably with courtesy and friendliness since he had chosen to be civil to him.

“What does he mean by presuming to be a Prince?” a voice asked within him. “Why is it he, and not I? Will he be for, or against me now about Stella? Won’t he look higher for a quasi brother-in-law than to me, one of his tenants? Won’t the Englishman, the rich relation of the Princess, suit him better than a mere farmer on his *métairie*?”

Then there was the priest, surely he had had some suspicion of how things stood last evening, when he tried to dissuade him from thinking of Stella as his possible wife?

He anathematized them all round, the priest, the Princess, Lippo, the Englishman, and Stella, the whole pack of them. He saw them all united in a con-

spiracy against his progress, against his wishes; and the sultry breeze, which after the brilliant day had come up with banks of dark threatening clouds, sent the blood coursing wildly through his veins, so that he longed to pour out what had been raging and blazing within him for the last two hours.

He was grimly glad of this encounter with Stella and Filippo; and that he was obliged to hold himself within bounds and was not able to say out exactly what he felt, increased his ire, and spiteful feelings.

“Ah, Signor Filippo, your Highness!” he exclaimed bowing low. “Highness! who would have thought it? I commend myself most humbly to your Highness and the Signora Stella! Oh, I am not a fool. I understand all! all!”

“What does this mean, Marco?” exclaimed Filippo with repellent severity, for he could not mistake the tone of malignant scorn; “are you mad?”

“Oh, I only wished to offer my humble congratulations to your Highness and to beg your favour,” replied Marco, collecting himself. It would not be playing his cards well to forfeit the new master’s esteem.

Filippo, whose only desire was to get rid of him, accepted his apology.

"Thank you, Marco," he said, "I believe you: I am sure you rejoice in my good fortune, and I wish you, too, all prosperity in your line of life. But kindly leave us now and let us pass on."

"You shall be obeyed, your Highness!" Marco said, foaming with rage at this repulse, and as he passed by Stella he whispered: "I said I would be even with you yet."

She did not understand him. Filippo asked him what he wished to say to her.

"Nothing, nothing, Highness, I only wished to remind Stella not to forget her devoted slave, if you have no objection."

"Marco!" said Filippo, and once more the consciousness of his new dignity gave him the cool self-assurance he needed. "Marco, you know I have no doubt that the events of this day have excited us all, and Stella and myself not the least. Now let us go on please. I am taking Stella to Signora Peggy's, she needs rest. To-morrow we set out for Rome. When we come back, tell me exactly what you wish, and if I can do anything I am willing to be of service to you."

He took Stella's arm—a thing he had never done before at Roccaforte—and they pursued their way round

the building to the back wing of the villa facing the wood, where Peggy's room was situated.

"Marco mustn't stay here," he said. "Keep out of his way till we come back."

"He doesn't concern me! Listen, Lippo? I tell you honestly, I must speak to Wilfredo. Tell him that I will wait for him here, that he must come, that he shall tell me himself what you have just told me — and if he doesn't come, well then I shall come to him — even if he and I and you and the whole world go to perdition through it."

Filippo trembled for her, for there was all the violence of insanity in her words. "You don't know what you are saying," he said in a warning voice; "I will come with you and explain—"

"Yes, I do know what I say, but you will drive me raving mad," she cried as he was walking in with her, for he dreaded leaving her to herself with that wild look in her eyes.

She caught hold of his hand, and stopped his entrance. "No, not you!" she commanded. "He shall come! Tell him that I am waiting for him."

Marco had followed them at a distance, and had not lost sight of them for a single instant. He saw Filippo

turn round and retrace his steps, and, looking after him, he hissed through his teeth: "There goes one of them, now for the other, the right one!"

CHAPTER XVI.

IT was quite dark when Filippo returned to the terrace. The breeze which had come up from the south had risen to a strong wind, and howled and moaned round the villa. It drove the great masses of heavy clouds before it, and only now and then the light of the faint, pale moon, which had just risen, broke through the darkness. Here and there a few rockets and balloons rose from the valley, they had been left over from some great festa, and came in appropriately now to celebrate the beginning of the new Pope's reign.

The Princess and Don Matteo had already retired. Wilfrid and the Prince were sitting together on the verandah, and depressed as Filippo was, he was rejoiced to find his father still there.

"How glad I am that you are not gone to rest," he said, as he drew near him.

The Prince asked if he wanted anything.

“Yes, my father!” he said, bending down to kiss the Prince’s hand: “I long to wish my father good night and sweet dreams.”

The Prince clasped him tenderly in his arms. “Heaven grant them to all of us!” and with the national, “Felicissima notte!” he left the two friends alone.

What was to pass between them did not need many words. It was only through distrust of himself, and by an extraordinary exercise of self-control, that Wilfrid had renounced the idea of seeing Stella once more, to tell her that her suffering would be branded in his soul for evermore, that he would never cease to long for her, never forget her. It did him good to hear that she wished to see him, and that it was Filippo who begged him to comply with her desire.

As he rose to go, Filippo caught his arm. “I will come with you, and wait for you,” he said; “try to make it easier for her by a short farewell.”

Wilfrid did not raise any objection to this. Swiftly and silently they passed along the front of the house. At the corner Filippo stood still.

“I will stay here and wait,” he said, sitting down. But he could not conquer his restlessness. He got up and walked about, watching the sullen clouds which the wind lashed onwards with ever increasing fury and impatience, as if in its mad flight it could give wings to time.

A few minutes after he had left Filippo, Wilfrid stood outside the room of his beloved one. The two bay-windows were still open, the lamp burned on the table. In Peggy’s other room it was dark.

Stella had heard the gravel crunching under quickly advancing footsteps. Her longing for the man she loved was so strong and so intense that she had felt sure it must bring him to her, and because she thought of nobody and nothing but him, she ran out to meet him.

“At last! at last! Oh, they all told lies. I knew you would come! As if you were not truth itself,” she cried as she flew to him; “now come, come to me!”

She hung round his neck, he pressed her to his heart. “Yes,” he said, “I have come, but we have only a few moments!” and as he spoke, he led her into the shadow of the great trees opposite, and

dropped down with her on a marble seat at the foot of the Ildefonso group, which stood there.

He tried to say that he had come to take leave of her, but only the words: "Stella! Stella, darling, sweet Stella!" passed his lips, while hers were sealed by his warm, passionate kisses.

Almost at the same moment she leapt up. "Wilfredo!" she screamed, and the sound died on her lips. She fell prone at his feet, while Wilfrid gripped Marco's arm in a sinewy grasp.

With a skilful manœuvre he wrenched the knife from him, and Filippo, who on hearing Stella's cry had rushed to the spot, saw, by the light which the lamp in the room cast upon the scene, the knife flash in Wilfrid's hand which, as they closed in a deadly struggle, he thrust into Marco's throat.

It was a well aimed blow. Like a felled tree Marco lay stretched on the ground. Wilfrid knelt down by Stella. She had fainted, her white dress was covered with blood, her breathing scarcely perceptible.

She had seen Marco, who had been hidden behind the statue, creep out close to Wilfrid, had seen the knife gleam in his hand, and then had sprung up to

shield her lover with her own body, and had received the blow which had been meant for him.

Stella's piercing cry, Wilfrid's and Filippo's calls, brought people flocking to the spot. The friends carried Stella to the house between them. Peggy had just come from the Princess's room to her own. The priest and the Prince were sent for instantly. The horror of that terrible night in the Palace of Anciesella had been repeated in a more ghastly form, here in Roccaforte. The happy night which the Prince had wished his son and all the inhabitants of the villa, had been turned into a night of bloodshed and mourning.

Marco's life flowed out with his hot blood, the death-rattles were in his throat. Rigid and mute the priest stood over the corpse of his nephew. It was too late for the Sacrament and the last rites of the Church. The old man could not now command his accustomed, dignified calmness in danger and affliction, for once, he could not submit himself patiently to God's will. His heart was crushed, his reason trembling in the balance. He bowed his head, smote his breast, and followed the corpse with an uncertain gait as they bore it away.

Filippo's great love for Stella was newly awakened. He wept with his head on his father's shoulder. Wil-

frid would not stir from her side, and no one resisted him. Her consciousness returned when they had undressed her and laid her in her bed. The Princess, almost as white as the wounded girl, sat by her side, while Peggy and the lady's maid did all in their power to restore her. The Prince alone was calm and self-possessed.

Directly Stella opened her eyes they sought Wilfrid. "Where are you?" she asked, scarcely audibly.

He called her gently by her name, bending over her. She put out her hand to him.

"Don't leave me!" she implored, "and let him come too!"

Before they could ask whom she meant, she again became unconscious, but she held Wilfrid's hand fast in hers. There was no fear of his leaving her, he was oblivious to everything else, his whole soul was full of anguish for her, and for her alone.

Quickly as these events had followed one another, a whole hour had elapsed. The Prince insisted on Charlotte and his son coming away from the heart-rending scene. It was quite bad enough that Filippo had been present when the murderous act was per-

petrated, and that he had arranged the disastrous rendez-vous.

All the people in the villa had completely lost their heads; even the sensible practical old steward. The last twelve hours had been too much for them. The Prince gave all the necessary orders in person. He sent for medical aid, as thirty years before it had been sent for, for him; he gave instructions that, at the same time as the doctor was fetched, the police authorities should be summoned from the nearest borough. "They can be here by daybreak, and," added the Prince, "if it is possible for the magistrates to settle this lamentable affair here, we will break up at once. I shall go with the young Prince to Rome, as we had previously arranged. The Princess will decide whether she feels disposed to follow us, and Don Matteo also."

"And Wilfrid?" put in Filippo.

"I will try to manage," said the Prince, "that, if I pledge my word for him, he shall remain in the villa at liberty, till further directions are issued by the competent authorities, concerning him."

"Then I will stay here for the present as his guard," said Filippo.

“No! You are not called upon to do this. You must come to Rome with me. It is necessary on Wilfrid’s account; for you are the only eye-witness to his having acted in self-defence. But naturally I had hoped to install you in my house under happier circumstances, and with a lighter heart. The interview with the Holy Father will now be associated in your mind for ever with painful impressions.”

This was the first mention the Prince had made of his own feelings and opinion in the unfortunate affair, and all who heard him were impressed with their great weight and significance.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE Prince carried out his intentions. Wilfrid remained at liberty. Charlotte’s and the priest’s departure were out of the question under present circumstances. Matteo wished to superintend Marco’s funeral, and the Princess’s condition of soul made the priest’s presence indispensable to her.

The doctor had declared that there was only the faintest shadow of a hope that Stella’s life might be

saved. The knife-thrust had severed one of the large arteries, and the exhaustion caused by the loss of blood was too much even for her blooming, vigorous youth. She was very weak, but quite conscious.

The Prince would not consent to Filippo seeing her on the morning before he started, but both, he and his son, took leave of Wilfrid in the room adjoining the sick-chamber, which Wilfrid never left, for Stella became uneasy if she could not see him whenever she opened her eyes, and he was as hungry for her loving glances as she was anxious for his. His whole future hung on her life. He could not endure the thought that he would lose her; and that she should be the victim of his irresolution, and his weakness, maddened him. If she died, there was nothing more to care about or hope for in the world. What could he be to his mother, he, with the life of his darling on his conscience, he who had committed a murder? Home was no place for him: what use would he be there, desperate in his despair and burdened with his guilt?

Hours and days crept slowly and sadly away in the Villa Roccaforte. Marco was buried, the priest had confessed and done penance in the neighbouring

monastery and every day, in the presence of the whole household, he read masses for the dead. The beauty of nature, which was now in the full glory of summer, seemed unreal, and out of keeping with the solemn gloom that reigned in the house. Death hovered there, and cast its dark shadows on the fair abode and its inhabitants.

It had been agreed that Lady Jane should not be written to till the magistrates had given their verdict in Wilfrid's case. The entry into the Palazzo Roccaforte, which Filippo had looked forward to the day before as a festival, was accomplished in a thoroughly business-like manner. The Prince decided which rooms Filippo should inhabit, he called him his son and Prince Filippo, without adding any explanation. He left it to the servants whom he had brought with him to tell the rest.

The best surgeon in Rome was despatched immediately to the villa, and as soon as it was feasible the Prince went to the head-quarters of the Constabulary to hold an interview with the Chief Justice of the High Court, and then proceeded to the English Embassy; not till he had taken these steps did he go to the Vatican, to arrange an audience for the next day.

Filippo had been in the palace several times last autumn, when he had been first consulted about designs for the chapel. Then the thought had occurred to him, as he passed through the long open galleries into the spacious vestibules, what a glorious work it would be to decorate these walls with representations *al fresco*, like those in the Farnesina, and the Loggie of the Vatican. Now, as he strolled with his father through the corridors, the long suites of apartments and salons, which, situated in the three wings at the back of the galleries, looked out in the palace court-yard and garden, he spoke of this to the Prince, who listened attentively, and said that he was master now, and might improve and alter as much as he wished. They went from room to room, and Filippo learnt from his father the names of his ancestors and the history of his house, as they lingered before statues, armour and old pottery, which had associations attached to them.

"Father," he asked when the Prince had led him into his library, and they stood before the portraits of his parents and his sister, the Princess Agatha, "did my mother ever come here?"

"Never!" the Prince answered.

"And have you a picture of her?"

The Prince bowed his head. He went to his desk and, opening a secret drawer in it, drew out a plain gold case; he pressed the spring with his finger, and Filippo saw a woman's gentle face looking at him with clear, sweet eyes.

Involuntarily he pressed it to his lips.

"She deserves it of you," said the Prince. "Henceforth it is yours. Carry the miniature about with you as a memento, and—keep your life free from guilt; for remorse is of no avail, and never makes any atonement. You cannot wake the dead, and can never eradicate the suffering of those who are sacrificed."

Filippo thought of his friend and thought of Stella. They were both silent till a Capuchin-Padre was announced, and shown in at the Prince's request.

"Padre Eusebio," exclaimed Filippo, advancing to greet him, as the old man bowed before the Prince.

"You know the Padre?" asked the Prince.

"Yes, he is Stella's great-uncle."

The Prince made a sign to his son to leave them. He did not wish Filippo to reveal too prematurely, what all too soon must have reached the public; neither did he wish him to hear the information with

regard to his birth which, he hoped, the Padre had brought.

The Prince remained standing before the Padre. "You come, I presume, at Don Matteo's instigation. Do you bring me any news, Padre Eusebio?" he asked when Filippo had left the room.

"I believe, your Highness, I have obtained the desired intelligence," answered the monk, bowing again, while he drew out of his cowl a small packet, which, however, he did not hand to the Prince.

"Heaven, your Highness, has favoured my inquiries. I recollected when I received your Highness's letter that in that year, and on the day mentioned by Don Matteo, we were called to officiate at the burial of a foreigner, who—Highness, such cases are of frequent occurrence,—" he said, interrupting himself and putting the packet into his cowl again while he refreshed himself with a pinch of snuff. The Prince did not interfere, but kept his eyes fastened upon him.

"Such things are continually happening in the world," the Padre said, resuming the thread of his narrative. "It was at a mid-wife's, not far from our Cloister in the Via Purificazione. She was called

Katharina, and was known in her time as a trustworthy, reticent woman. Directly I thought of it, I went to the Via Purificazione, where Lucia, Katharina's daughter, who is married to Bellpasso, a worker in marble, has inherited the house from her mother and carries on her trade. She is pious, and a skilful woman too, as I can vouch for."

"Go on—go on!" urged the Prince, who had to curb his impatience, for fear Eusebio should get confused, and lose the connexion of his story.

"Well then! I said to myself: Lucia at that time was a little maiden of thirteen or fourteen years of age. She will surely remember it. Anyhow it is worth asking her. So I went to her, and it proved that the Lord had led me to the right source."

"And what did you hear from the woman?"

"Lucia, your Highness, knew all. In that night a carriage drove up to their door, there was a gentleman inside, and a lady with child. Katharina got two tidy rooms ready for her, and doctored her carefully. Yes, Highness! such is the way of the world. It ought to be better, but—"

"And what happened to the unfortunate mother?"

“Lucia says, her mother did all she could, but it was impossible to save the woman, and she died.”

“And the child?”

“The little one, Lucia says, was so weak and small, that they quite believed he would not live either. The gentleman did not trouble himself much about either the woman or the child. He paid Katharina her due, left money behind for the funeral, wrote down the young lady’s name, it was a young lady and not his wife, and said that if the boy lived, he was to be taken to the Foundlings, and that no inquiries would ever be made about him.”

“And the foreign lady? Did she not leave any instructions?”

“About that, your Highness, Lucia said nothing. She probably doesn’t know more. The foreigner was buried in the manner usual in such cases. They had the boy privately baptized directly, fed him and took every care of him for the next few days, and then brought him to San Spirito, as the gentleman had desired.—And it is now eight years since we carried Katharina herself to the grave. But Lucia knows that the boy was given the name Filippo.”

“Let this Lucia come to me!” said the Prince

eagerly, "perhaps she possesses something in her handwriting, or a sign of some kind."

The Padre was not to be hurried into doing anything precipitately.

"Your Highness!" he said, "I am convinced that it was the boy for whom investigations are being made, who, through God's grace, was placed in my relation's house, and thereby started on the path along which Heaven had ordained to lead him to you. Lucia is an honest woman, who, like her mother, has never spared any trouble in the exercise of her duties. "I beg your Highness to receive her with favour."

"Of course! certainly! She shall not be a loser, neither shall your convent! But you had something in your hand just now which you concealed in your cowl. What was that? It has some connexion with what you have told me? Did the foreigner leave it behind, or the dead woman?"

"The foreigner left nothing but the money to pay Katharina, and for other purposes which I have mentioned. Of course, the articles which the lady wore, are no longer in existence. How could it be otherwise, your Highness? Only a small ring—"

"A ring? Have you got it there?"

"I have, Your Highness!" replied the Padre, cautiously undoing the small paper parcel, and producing the ring.

"That is it!" cried the Prince gazing at the relic of times long gone by in mute astonishment.

The ring consisted of several narrow gold hoops twisted together with a large ruby in the centre.

"Sit down, Padre Eusebio!" said the Prince, at the same time seating himself, for the exciting events of the last few days were beginning to tell upon him.

The Padre obeyed, and a complacent smile beamed on his shrewd old countenance.

"You have done me and my son a great service," the Prince said next, "and you and your monastery, shall not be forgotten, as I said before! — Send Lucia to me to-day." — He named the hour. — "She shall give her evidence here before a legal witness and name the sum she requires for the ring."

The Padre rose. "Highness! Lucia shall come, but in this case it is not the woman's place to demand anything."

The Prince understood him. "She shall have no reason to complain of me!" he intimated. "And now

once more my hearty thanks! Remember me to his Eminence the Signor Cardinal!”

“And your pardon, Highness! Stella is my niece’s child—how is Stella, Highness?”

“You shall hear to-morrow! Now goodbye, for the present.”

Eusebio went away. Don Salvatore drew a deep breath. His eyes were dim with tears as he looked at the little love-token which he had placed on Josephine’s finger, when, with a heavy heart, he had parted from her at Lucca. Donna Ersilia, the Prince’s mother, had worn the ring, and he wore it after her. Now it should be his son’s to put on the hand of his future wife, for the road which lay before Filippo was made smooth and even.

With so much evidence, and so many proofs, his recognition would not be likely to meet with any difficulties. All was shaping itself just as he could desire, only the doctor’s verdict who had returned to Rome was unfavourable. There was now no hope for Stella, and Filippo yearned to be able to hasten to her and Wilfrid.

But the Prince would not be prevailed upon to let him go yet. He had waited on the Pope, and, as he

had hoped, had been favourably received, and obtained his ready consent to Filippo's reception after a judicial acknowledgement of his new and rightful position. It had been settled between the English ambassador and the director of the Criminal Court of Justice, that Wilfrid, after Stella's expected death, should appear before the magistrates; and while the Prince was thus engaged making these arrangements, Filippo was left to his own devices and meditations.

The intelligence of the miraculous change in his lot had, through the medium of the servants at the palace and Padre Eusebio, spread as quickly as the news that Marco was murdered and Stella wounded, but who the murderer was, no one was quite sure. These last events—because their like was nothing very unusual among the people—did not excite so much attention, and were not so much discussed as the fact that Filippo Mai, Gianbattista's pupil, the painter whom they all knew, had with one bound become a Prince and the son of the Prince Roccaforte.

When he went to the Piazza Rusticucci to see the old people, to whom he had to convey the sorrowful tidings of their grandchild's hopeless state, he was

greeted with the reproach, that it was for his sake the Princess had taken Stella away from them, and that he (as the granddame was not content with saying once, but must repeat over and over again) had prevented Stella listening to Marco's advances and had thereby brought her to her death-bed, instead of her bridal couch. He had to defend himself to deaf ears. The old couple's indifference towards Stella seemed to have suddenly turned into the warmest and most ardent affection. It evidently did the old pair good to blame the man whom, as a poor youth, they had always tried to look down upon, whom now that he was suddenly raised to a position so far above them, they did not choose to honour or respect.

They took the fee he offered them as if it were only their due, and without a word of thanks.

"He never could endure the charcoal smoke," mumbled the old woman, when he left them, "and Stella couldn't either. But better smoke than the cold grave."

In his old workshop, his welcome was not much warmer. He went there to superintend the removal in waggons of his things to his new atelier in his own home. The landlord, the people in the house, and old

comrades he looked in upon, had indeed congratulations ready for him, but their bearing was not the same as it had been, and their manner was constrained. When he addressed them in his old friendly way, they took it as condescension, and thanked him with an air of humble deference which did not please him. He found himself all at once cut adrift from his old world, and while he was trying to get used to the new, his thoughts would wander to the villa where his Stella's life hung on a thread.

As he sat on the little seat beneath the cypresses, recalling the time when his dearest wish had been to pass his artist's life there with Stella, he saw Chiaruccia come out of one of the studios.

"Good day, Santo! So you are back again once more!" she said, hastening towards him with a quick elastic step and that vigorous grace of movement which he had always admired in her. She offered him her hand, and he gave her his with all his heart.

"That's right! I said so. Prince or not! it is all the same, he will come back and be as nice as ever, that's what I told them. How are you? They talk of you down there just as if you had got a new nose and a new mouth, but I said: He is a good

honest painter and won't be changed a bit, he'll be his old self still."

"That was the truth and no mistake, Chiara!" he exclaimed, delighted, "and in the winter you and I will work together in the Palazzo Roccaforte as well as we did here."

"And you will pay like a Prince!"

"Like a Prince!" he assured her, for her liveliness raised his spirits, and he felt the artist's humour and love of fun bubbling up in him. "I shall have more work than ever on hand,—great frescoes for my father's palace."

"And you have finished your chapel and done with Stella? How is Stella? What is this about her and the Milordo, and Marco?"

He told her; she clasped her hands together with an exclamation of horror.

"Will she die?" she asked when he had finished.

"I am afraid she cannot be saved."

She shook her head sadly, and was lost in thought for a few minutes. Then her brown face brightened again quickly.

"Don't you remember? Miranda perished in that way too. Oh, these men! one ought to know them by

this time! They are all alike. That is to say, not you of course! You were always the good Santo. But didn't I tell Stella she must be on her guard with every one of them? They are false, and jealous into the bargain. One is as bad as another. But I wouldn't have minded Marco for all that. He was wild enough but strong, as a Hercules. Certainly it is a pity to think of him lying cold and dead!"

She had only half listened to what Filippo had told her with much reserve, and now she arranged the story, in her original manner, to her own liking. Her curiosity was satisfied, and as she had still work before her, and an appointment to keep, she got up from the seat.

"Au revoir, Lippo!" she said, "we will hope that she'll get better, poor thing!"

"If God wills it so!" said Filippo earnestly.

"Yes, if God wills it so. And if not—well then she must die. Men come and go, and those who are too good for this world, the Holy Mother takes to herself betimes. You will pray for her and let masses be said for her in plenty, you are so rich now.—Ah! I think it must be lovely to be rich; and do you know, Filippo, you have grown quite handsome as well as

rich, you are as ruddy and broad as possible. Well, goodbye, Signor Prince! And when you are at home for the winter, and should happen to want me, you will know where to find me, and I 'll do my best for your Highness!"

She laughed at him mischievously, and waved her hand to him as she tripped up the stone steps.

Filippo looked after her. He had never liked her so well, and he was amused at her superficial philosophy, and the hardness with which she looked at life in common with the majority of the people belonging to her class. He had grown up among them and had associated with Chiaruccia and many like her from his earliest boyhood; and yet he had never held these kind of views.

"It was not in my blood," he said to himself, and the mingling of joy and pain which accompanied this reflection, was not the least of the wonders he had experienced in these eventful days.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A WEEK passed which had been employed by the Prince in the fulfilment of arduous duties. Filippo had been obliged to accompany him almost everywhere.

In those days public life, which has developed in later decades to such an extraordinary degree, especially during the present new régime, was unknown in Rome. The single newspaper which existed did not publish anything which those who enjoyed the favour of government thought fit to withhold. The plastic and significant old Roman phrase "they say" was still whispered from mouth to mouth, and what was told at the Porta del Popolo, bore no resemblance to the original story issued from the Porta S. Giovanni.

In the morning people related to each other on the Lungara that the Prince's brother-in-law had slain the nephew of the priest of S. Maria Traspontina; but this report was not exciting enough to satisfy the good citizens. By noon it was whispered in the Piazza Navona that Marco had murdered the Prince's son, while in the evening the tradespeople in the Corso,

from whom the Prince had ordered an entirely new outfit for the painter who was well known to them as Filippo Mai, did not know how much they were to believe of the rumours they heard, and how Mai came to be involved in the affair at all.

Where ever he went: in the rooms of the legal magnates, or the English minister, and in the salons of the Cardinals, Filippo was the object of general observation, and received the good wishes of all: and if the Prince was pleased at the quiet dignity and modesty with which his son comported himself through these trying ordeals, he did not fail to notice his relief when all necessary business had been transacted; and on the evening of the sixth day of their absence from the villa, they were again on the road which led out of the depths of the Campagna to the heights of Roccaforte.

Their return had been anxiously expected. Stella had not gained strength, but was slowly fading away. Wilfrid was hardly to be recognized, he was so changed. The Princess could find no comfort. The terrible evil of which she had been the wilful cause, haunted her day and night. The consolation with which she had hoped to appease her conscience, that

she had done it all for the benefit of Wilfrid's soul, would not hold good against the inner voice of well deserved reproach. Marco's death, Stella's rapid decline, Wilfrid's silent and abject despair, the priest's affliction, were all her accusers, and her thoughts wandered restlessly to the far-off home in her own country, and pictured the crushing effect the news would have upon Wilfrid's mother when it reached her, which it must do before long.

Compassion for Lady Jane sharpened the sting of self-accusation. She would have liked to throw herself on her knees at her aunt's feet and say: "All this is my doing! Revenge it on me, as I longed to be revenged on you!"—Those inexorable words with which Lady Jane had turned her back upon her, "Go and reap among foreigners that which you have sown for yourself by your disregard of honour and conscience," sounded now like a curse; and the shy, reserved demeanour which those who served her had assumed towards her, made her secret ruminations all the more bitter and more galling.

The priest was the first to throw off his grief and recover his composure, for he had to support and strengthen those whose souls it was his calling to care

for. Full of gentleness towards Wilfrid, unwearying in his attentions and goodness to Stella, he did not spare the Princess. He left her alone in her contrition and humiliation; he reminded her, that he had expressly warned her not to use Stella as a means to the attainment of selfish ends, at the same time he condemned the superstition which led her to interpret her aunt's parting words as a curse, as if the Most High, in His supreme wisdom, gave ear to the imprecations of one of His angry and sinful creatures. He reminded her of the six years of happy married life which with God's protection and grace, she had enjoyed. He told her that for the Prince's sake to whom she had entrusted her future, it was her duty to rally and begin anew; to be his cheerful companion till death parted them. Having impressed this upon her, he added that repentance is of no avail if he who feels it becomes inert and useless: only a fruitful repentance is acceptable to the Lord, and he hoped that God would grant her time to make expiation, by a life full of good works, for that sin which very properly filled her with remorse and made her heart sorrowful.

If he left the Princess to herself, he gave much of his time to Wilfrid. Religious dogmas, and the

influence of the Catholic faith on art, no longer formed the subject of their conversation. Wilfrid saw the result of a real confidence in God and submission to Him, in the patient resignation with which the priest had overcome the poignant grief which his own personal loss caused him; in the sweet content with which Stella anticipated her end, and in her joy in beauty and Nature, which remained undiminished.

Not a complaint had once passed Stella's lips since she had recovered consciousness. "He lives? he is safe, isn't he?" were her first words, and when they were verified she was happy. The delight of having saved the life of her beloved, of his being with her all day long, made her forget her pain and scarcely feel her weakness. They had not told her that Marco was dead, and that he had died by Wilfrid's hand. She thought they had taken him away to preserve her and Wilfrid from the danger of his mad jealousy, and she was satisfied.

They had made up her couch in one of the sunny drawing-rooms on the ground floor. Sister Monica waited on her, for Peggy in her rebellious state of mind and horror at the tragedy that had taken place,

was out of the question. The priest was constantly with Stella, and Wilfrid hardly moved from her side. The Princess was obliged to use Stella's influence when she wanted to induce him to think of himself and his own health.

Stella always called him her bridegroom, his attentions to her were those of a lover and husband; and no one interfered. For Wilfrid had determined from the first that his life must be entirely given up and bound to her who had been willing to sacrifice herself for him; the wisdom and gentleness with which Don Matteo acted for them all, drew the grief-stricken young man into the arms of the Church more effectually than any previous expositions of doctrine had been able to do. The Priest's attitude towards Wilfrid now had all the consideration and patience of a loving friend and father.

No one talked of his conversion, because when there had still been a hope of Stella's recovery, he had expressed his determination to make her his wife. She, too, in hours when she felt better, had busied herself with thinking how beautiful it would be to stand with him at the altar and then go with him to

his country, where his mother would love her because she had saved her only son's life.

Then, in a few days, it was known that she would not live; she herself felt conscious that she was fading away, but she did not complain, and this, too, was due to the priest Matteo's influence.

On the same day on which the Prince left Rome, Stella awoke much weaker than she had yet been. Matteo came as usual to pray with her.

"My father," she said, "I think I shall not live much longer now."

"Not much longer here!" he answered. "If God ordains it so, my daughter; and if it pleases Him that you close your eyes for ever before the light of the sun, you will open them in the glorious radiance which shines about Him, you will be borne up to Him, as Filippo has painted you, to kneel before His throne in everlasting thankfulness and bliss, to pray for those whom you have left behind on earth, who will one day follow you into the Kingdom."

She folded her hands, and he prayed with her, feeling himself elevated through her joyful assurance and the faith which was this dying child's consolation, and rock of strength.

A little later, when she had rested, Wilfrid was allowed to come to her.

“How are you?” he asked, as she raised herself a little to lean on him.

“I shall not dance the Saltarello any more,” she said, and held up her mouth to be kissed; “how beautiful it was up there! Do you remember?”

“You must hope, and take courage!” he exclaimed while his heart bled. “When October comes we will drive up there again. And they will all envy me because I possess you, even if you do not dance! We shall go up there again, I am sure we shall.”

“Up! yes, up!” she repeated, “but not up there, not to the Vigne!—Do not let me go alone! Do not,” she entreated him, “let me pray for one who cannot follow me to eternal happiness, to live with me in the light of the Saviour’s loveliness and glory.”

It was the first time since she had been lying there that she had spoken thus to him. He had hoped to be able to wait till she was better, before he joined her Church. But now that was all over.

At noon, when Filippo arrived, he was at once taken to the sick room, because she had been asking for him with ever increasing impatience. When he

saw Stella and his friend beside her, he stood still in the door-way with hands reverently clasped, as if in the presence of a sacred picture.

Pale as a marble statue she lay there perfectly motionless, one hand in Wilfrid's, the other holding a few roses. He needed all his presence of mind to hide what he felt.

"I have been waiting for you such a long time," she said, offering him her roses, "take them, they are so sweet! *He* will get me some more."

The friends shook hands, but that was all that passed between them.

"Are you suffering much, my Stella?" asked Filippo.

"Suffering? no! I am too happy," she replied, her eyes wandering to her lover full of tenderness. "You know he is always there."

Wilfrid knelt down near her and buried his head in his hands. He would not let her see the tears that filled his eyes. Stella ran her fingers through his hair, and the dimpling smiles which had fascinated Filippo when she was a tiny child, and ensnared Wilfrid's heart, began to play on her pale lips again. "You

are a Prince now Lippo!" she said, "but look! you haven't got such beautiful fair curls as these!"

"My angel! my darling!" cried Wilfrid, covering her hand with kisses; but it had been too much for her, she closed her eyes and sank back. Sister Monica signed to the young Prince to leave the room, Wilfrid remained where he was, that he might not disturb Stella by moving.

When she came to herself again, she laid her hand on her heart. "I am weak, Wilfredo!" she said. "I believe I shall soon fall asleep. But I cannot die without you."

"No! no! You shall not die. You will live, my darling, indeed you will!" So he vainly tried to comfort her and himself; for the nearer death came, the less was he able to grasp that she who spoke to him now these tender, loving words, and who was so completely his own, could be torn from him; that she would smile at him no more, talk to him no more; that she would die and be hidden from him under the earth, for ever! They both lived and loved. How could that be altered? Death! no it should not, it could not be! Then, as if he could snatch her out of death's grasp by chaining her to him and his life with an

earthly tie, he said: "Sleep now, Stella, take a long rest and dream sweetly! To-morrow—"

"To-morrow?" she said.

"To-morrow the priest shall unite us, and Heaven will hear my prayer. He will let you wake to-morrow with new strength, to begin a new life with me!"

"With you!" she said softly. He kissed her on lips and brow, and went away in tears.

CHAPTER XIX.

IT was long after midnight when Wilfrid left the priest's room, who embraced him and made the sign of the cross over him for the first time, as they parted.

His faith in himself broken, Wilfrid found he could not recover himself without spiritual assistance. He was guilty of the death of his beloved one. Incessantly he put the question to himself whether, when he had disarmed Marco, it had been necessary to strike him down, whether self-defence, and the duty of self-preservation, had really forced him to kill his assailant?

And while one moment he considered himself and his future lost, and ruined, in the next, the hope sprang up in him that God could not be so cruel as to let the innocent die. Sappho's despairing cry: "He is no God, that robs me of my love!" rose from the depths of his heart, causing it the wildest agony, while it became softened for supplication and prayer.

The stay and support he needed he found in the priest and in his own quiet example of submission and faith in a time of trouble. He pointed out to him the peace of soul with which Stella could part from life and the earthly happiness she had so hoped for, because she was a believer. He spoke of the remedies which the Church offered to the repentant and heavily laden sinner. Wilfrid's admiration for the poetry of Catholicism had, during his intercourse with the priest in Rome, made him more and more disposed to accept the ideas and precepts of which that poetry was the outcome; his outer and inner condition now accomplished the rest. He had always believed in a God, in the immortality of the soul, and had hoped for that other country, that better life beyond the grave. What remained to him now when he lost Stella, but the

hope of being united to her again in another world? the realization of which hope filled her young heart. He stood wavering between the mother who had given him birth on one side, and the girl who had sacrificed her life for him on the other. He could not resist her now, he could not let her die in despair about his soul. He longed for the conflict to be over, and to place himself body and soul under the control and direction of a visible Church, so as to be guided on, until he became capable once more of walking in its ways by his own free will. The priest's confident and persuasive assurances that the Church alone could afford him what he needed, were at last readily accepted by Wilfrid. He requested that he might give himself up to her influence at once, to find in her a new birth and new life.

The Prince, his son, and the Princess were all witnesses the next day of the solemn ceremony in which Wilfrid renounced the faith in which he had been born and brought up, in order to take the vows of the Catholic Church. Charlotte prayed for him with tears of thankfulness in her eyes. His conversion seemed to her his salvation. The young Prince,

Filippo, himself an ardent believer, clasped his friend in his arms, rejoiced at feeling their friendship strengthened by this new bond of union between them.

Stella had slept, without any improvement in her condition. Her hours were now numbered. The priest brought her lover to her in the morning, and told her that Wilfrid had been converted, that he was now a Christian according to her creed, and that he was come to hear mass and take the blessed Sacrament with her.

“Thank God!” she cried, and stretched out her hand to him. “Thank God! He has heard our prayers, now I can—”

She saw that Wilfrid trembled in anticipation of what she was going to say, and full of tender thoughtfulness even in this hour, she broke off and said: “Wait a little, sweetheart! they shall make me beautiful for our mass, our wedding! Come Sister Monica! come and help me!”

The two men withdrew. The Princess’s lady’s-maid was called; Stella wished her hair to be braided and her dress changed, and to wear a wreath of flowers on her head. They hesitated, thinking she was too weak to bear the exertion. But the doctor, who

had just arrived from the town, advised them to let her do as she desired. For he said, it was the last wish they might ever be able to grant her.

The Prince, his wife, and son came back with the priest and Filippo. Stella confessed—her whole life had been nothing but innocence and love. Wilfrid had confessed earlier. The Sacrament and absolution were administered to them both in common. Then the priest joined them in holy matrimony and Stella received the last unction.

Not an eye was dry. The Princess lay across Stella's bed, wrapt in fervent prayer.

"My husband!" breathed Stella, "ah, my husband!" He drew her into his arms, her head drooped on his shoulder. Suddenly her eyes seemed to search for somebody.

"What do you want, my Stella."

"Lippo! my Lippo!" she whispered.

"Here he is, do you not see him?" and "Here, here! I am near you Stella!" exclaimed her husband and Filippo together; then they perceived the dull, violet film of death gathering in her eyes.

"Lippo! the Sposalizio! my Sposalizio! He must be in it too!—close to me!" she said.

Filippo gave her his hand. "I will paint him as he is now, by your side," he promised, his voice choked with tears.

He had cherished and taken care of her, and loved her all her life. She had been his ideal; but never had she looked so beautiful to him as now in her transfiguration.

Her head had sunk on Wilfrid's breast, her hand became cold in his.

"Are you there?" she asked once more. He kissed her pure forehead.

"I am happy!" she murmured softly.

These were the last words that fell from her beautiful lips. A few moments later the fair soul passed gently away.

Filippo and Wilfrid fell into each other's arms, they had both loved her—both lost her.—Still despairing of himself, Wilfrid said: "Well for you that you are better than—that you are free from guilt."

"She is still ours! She will remain for ever a blessed, holy type of beauty!"

"God grant it!" exclaimed Wilfrid, too much overcome to say another word.

CHAPTER XX.

THE next morning, when the sun had risen high in the heavens, they buried her near the new chapel in which Filippo had immortalized her beauty, and made her the object of devotion for coming generations.

He and Wilfrid carried her themselves to her last resting place. The clergy, at whose head she had walked dressed as an angel in the Corpus Christi procession, sang the litanies for the dead over her in a low monotone. A solemn stillness reigned in the villa on that memorable day.

On the following morning they all left for Rome. Wilfrid had to appear before the authorities, he was taken into custody, but was treated with every consideration and respect. He was allowed to receive letters from his mother and write letters to her, which, of course, were read by the officials. It was now no longer practicable to keep Lady Jane in ignorance of the unhappy event.

The Prince, his son and the priest gave evidence

before the Judges that Wilfrid had acted in self-defence. His conversion was much in his favour. It served the government better than his punishment could have done. But that it might be said at home that he had turned Catholic in order to escape more easily from the hands of justice, was a new and most depressing consciousness for Wilfrid. He felt lost to the world and that the world was lost to him.

Meanwhile, in the Palazzo Roccaforte things were lively enough. Embassies from all countries had arrived in Rome with the good wishes of their rulers and potentates for the new Pope, believers of every position in life flocked to the Eternal City to do homage to him and to receive his blessing. The large circle of the Prince's acquaintance attended daily receptions in his house; so Don Filippo found himself suddenly plunged into the very thick of the distinguished society of the great fashionable world; and as his father had only appeared the more attractive to the women of his time, because of the mysterious clandestine adventure in which he had played the rôle of hero, so Filippo, whose name as an artist had been well known, became with his romantic history quite a lion among the fair Roman aristocrats,

while he won the regard of the men, both young and old, by his unpretentious, quiet demeanour and sterling qualities. These were bright days for him, which stood out in marked relief on the dark background of the late sad events.

Towards the end of August, Wilfrid was set at liberty, and the Prince acquiesced in his son's desire to accompany his broken-hearted friend to England. His wish came at a convenient time.

Filippo had never travelled; it was right that he should see foreign countries and become acquainted with foreign customs and peoples, to learn to appreciate the freedom of his position and to make use of his means. The sooner he did so, the better; and as he had learnt the value of money when he had so industriously toiled for it, the Prince had no reason to fear that he, like the young scions of his house before him, would fall into reckless extravagance, the evil consequences of which Don Salvatore had once to set himself the task of wiping out.

It was a brilliant sunny morning, when in the courtyard of the Palazzo Roccaforte the post-horses were put to the carriage in which the two friends were to start

on their journey to England. The Prince, Charlotte and the priest came out to bid them farewell. Peggy stood at a little distance behind the rest. She had already said good-bye to her young gentleman, on her own account, and told him all that was in her heart. The events of the last two months had aged her, and her hair had turned quite white.

The young Prince, full of hope, walked with a light step by Wilfrid's side to the carriage. The priest gave both of them his blessing. He exhorted Stella's young widower, who had never been her husband, to take heart and to trust to God to bestow on him new strength, new hopes in life, which in the future might lead to happiness. A weary smile was the only response. Charlotte's eyes were filled with tears. He was no longer the brilliant, handsome Wilfrid who had stood opposite her in Adalbert's studio when the idea had struck her to use Stella as a tool for his conversion, so that Lady Jane might experience what it was for her own flesh and blood to commit that which, in her niece, she had blamed as an unpardonable and inexcusable offence.

The postillion blew his horn, the servant who was to accompany the young Prince on his travels sprang

into his seat. The last "goodbyes" were exchanged, and away went Filippo into a new world.

When the carriage had left the yard, and the Princess had returned to her boudoir, Peggy came to her.

"Your Highness," she said, "I waited till Mr. Wilfrid was gone, because I thought he would not be able to bear up under it all, and if he had got ill, I could have given him English nursing and waiting on. But now I must go away, too, if your Highness will be good enough to spare me."

Charlotte looked at her in great distress. "You want to leave me?" she asked. "What does this mean? Are you not well?"

"Yes, Your Highness, I am well as far as health goes, but this country does not suit the likes of me. You, your Highness, must have noticed how gray my hair has become lately, and when I stand as I am standing now, my knees tremble and shake under me. I have had to see and live through too many horrors here, and then I have got beside myself, as Master Wilfrid did, with heartache and fright. I will go back to Yorkshire and Harbury Hall. Your Highness has got Daniela, whom I have taught well, and

done my best to make into a good servant. You won't miss me, my lady, and I should like to be buried along with my husband, and to have a funeral conducted according to our religion."

This announcement was a bitter pang to Charlotte, but she did not show it. "I have no objection to make to your request," she said firmly. "I never wished to bind you to me. You are your own mistress. Perhaps it is natural that you should wish to leave me now. Look out for an escort, and I will do the same; and when a favourable opportunity occurs you shall return home, although I am sorry to part with you. I need not remind you that I undertook to provide for your future when you made up your mind to come to me in Rome. I have to thank you for long and faithful service—yes, Peggy, you shall leave me as soon as it is possible, but I cannot let you travel alone."

Peggy kissed her hand. Both their hearts were heavy; the old woman left her mistress alone to her own reflections. The experiences of the last month had made a deep impression on her, and left their indelible mark on her inner life.

True, she was still the charming, vivacious hostess

who did the honours of her house with so much grace, but it did not escape the Prince's watchful eyes that she was acting a part and not enjoying her position with her whole soul, as she had formerly done. She had lost confidence in herself; she was more devout than ever, and looked to the priest to direct her in all her penitential exercises and good works; and the humility with which she sought the Prince's aid and advice, and asked his permission in all she did or undertook, touched and pained him; for he had always admired and loved her for her originality and self-reliance, and he as well as Matteo strove to restore her to her old independent self. Fortunately they had every reason to hope for success in the end; for they well knew the Princess's peculiar temperament.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE friends travelled slowly through Italy and Switzerland. It was on Wilfrid's account that they did not hasten their journey. All was new to Filippo, and he thoroughly enjoyed what he saw; for Wilfrid nothing was the same as it had once been, neverthe-

less his friend's sound and healthy mind, his keen artistic discernment for all that was of especial merit or value in the works of art which they went to see on their travels, his unbounded delight in foreign scenery, and his unsophisticated, simple piety, had a good influence upon Wilfrid, and made him a desirable companion for the depressed and unhappy young Englishman.

On almost the same day on which a year before the Three had gone up to the Vigne Verdi, brimming-over with light-hearted glee and joyous anticipation, to the October festivities, they were together again at Adalbert's country-seat, not far from Cologne, which he had inherited from his father, and where he lived alone when his mother and sisters were in town.

Wilfrid and the Prince had promised to be his guests, and all were rejoiced at the meeting; but if the Santo who had become a Prince, and Adalbert, the huge Nilo in the plenitude of his vigour were just the same as of old, the Milordo with Marco on his conscience, mourning the loss of Stella, and with the meeting with his mother still before him, was sadly changed.

It was of no avail for Adalbert in his buoyant spirits to plan excursions into hills and valley, to row them

over the green rippling water to the Seven Mountains; Wilfrid would not be comforted, and his soul remained dark and clouded.

As they sat, the last night before continuing their journey, on Adalbert's verandah beneath the vine festoons laden with grapes, as they had so often sat together in Rome, and in the Romans hills, Adalbert proposed they should conjure up again the old convivial *bonne camaraderie* of those happy, never-to-be-forgotten days.

Instead of Marino and Genzano wine, golden Rudesheimer sparkled in the green glasses. Here, too, there was a mandoline resting against one of the pillars. Filippo seized it, and the Luisella and the Marinarella rang from the young Prince's lips through the crisp German air as jocundly as in Rome. Then Nilo broke off a long trail of vine leaves, and twisting it into a becoming wreath, placed it on his head, and, raising his goblet to his lips, cried: "Long live the Three! Santo, Milordo and big Nilo! Let us go on living for ever in the memory of man, we three! like the holy Three Kings here in my native town, Cologne. And what we love, have loved and will love, shall remain like ourselves, for all times. Come let us fill a bumper on

the strength if it! Whoever is alive, must live. Drink, my Prince! Drink, Milordo, to the health of us all. We will go on living, and live to enjoy life!”

They all did as he wished. Filippo warmly and eagerly, Wilfrid with but a poor attempt at cheerfulness. Then Adalbert filled his glass again, lifted it once more above his head, and said: “And may her image ever float before us three in imperishable beauty and purity, to remind us that the perfection of an ideal can be found sometimes among men.—*Evviva la Stella!* and happy and blessed is the man whom she loved!”

Wilfrid's eyes filled with tears, but they were tears that did him good, tears that sprang from a well of pure sacred memories. He quietly withdrew and left Nilo and the Prince together.

The two others stayed chatting for a long time. They had still much to relate and confide to each other, of which, in Wilfrid's presence, they could not speak. They were both troubled about their friend's melancholy condition.

Filippo, whose intimacy with Wilfrid had always been closer and more sympathetic than the audacious

German's, hoped that, when Wilfrid had got over his trouble, he would take that soaring flight as an artist which he had often talked of and longed to achieve.

Adalbert thought it doubtful.

"There are men," he said leisurely, emptying his glass again, "men with many rare talents and great powers, who, in art as well as in life, remain always dilettanti, and I fear our poor friend is one of them. Actuated by the purest motives, and noblest sentiments, they miss that unity of thought and feeling, or, if I may call it so, that concentration of soul and body, of mental and physical faculties, of which the quick resolve to act, the unpremeditated grasp on things, are the result, and without which failure in art and life is inevitable. Such men catch hold of the paint-brush, as well as the realities of life, with their finger tips, instead of seizing them with an iron grip. They consider, meditate, weigh, sift, test and experimentalize, till all the fire of the original inspiration is extinguished, till the spirit that animated it has taken flight."

"But, in doing so, they guard themselves from mistakes and faults of which others are constantly guilty," interposed Filippo.

"Certainly not!" laughed Adalbert, "and is not it

better in the end to do or create something, even if it turns out altogether wrong, than only to mean or wish to do it? Wilfrid is intellectual and clever enough, but what has he accomplished in comparison with you and me! Such people as we are, do all we can by dint of straightforward industry, and then rough-hew our ends as we may, and leave the divinity to shape them, as the poet says."

"That is not altogether true. We always had a high aim in view, as well as he had, and besides he has produced some work that is excellent, and much that gives pleasure."

Adalbert only noticed the latter half of this observation. "Much that gives pleasure! what do you mean?—No! he and those like him are always, no matter in what case, craving for the ideal; they wish to have nothing to repent of, to wound no one, and so ruin themselves and others; and poor Wilfrid, in all conscience, has plenty to repent of, and has worked enough ruin to last a lifetime."

There was a pause, then Adalbert resumed: "I know that you do not entirely share my opinion, you yourself have doggedly pursued your own peculiar way. Perhaps you will yet in the future learn to see

that everywhere in Nature the lowest serve the highest purposes, that in this life, whoever won't be the forge, must be the anvil, or, in the strictest sense, everyone of us is both, forge and anvil at the same time, in the hands of destiny."

"I understand you perfectly!" Filippo answered, "but I do not think and feel as you do."

Adalbert made no answer, they were standing on the boundary line where their views of life diverged, and their friendship had ever been on the look-out that neither of them stepped over it.

"At least, you must admit that my frivolity has on the whole proved less dangerous and disastrous than Wilfrid's would-be conscientiousness."

"You are hard on him. He cannot help his own nature!"

"No! he is a mere dilettante, and dilettantism is an incurable disease. Wilfrid himself could not be cured of it even by a Stella."

"If you knew how I mourn for her! how often the question forces itself on me: Why was she obliged to love just him? Why should she die in the flower and beauty of her fair youth?"

“I would answer you with some words of Schiller’s, if you understood our language.”

“What are they?”

“‘Such is the fate of beauty on earth!’ Would you rather she had lived to become old and faded, to be no better than any ordinary woman?”

Filippo was silent. It was past midnight, so they both rose from their seats. Adalbert asked the Prince if he intended to accompany their friend home.

“No,” he said, “we shall separate in London, I am going to visit friends of my father there and in other parts of England, then, after a few weeks in Paris, I shall return to my work at Roccaforte. You know I have still to fulfil my contract with the Princess, and to finish the picture for the Chapel by her next wedding day, and I intend to do it, if nothing occurs to prevent me.”

“Bravo!” exclaimed Adalbert laughing.

“And I must paint my Stella in another picture too, as she looked in her dying hour, transfigured and ethereal. I shall never forget the heavenly expression of her face when she breathed her last!”

“Do so, by all means!” Then the friends wished

each other good night, and the next morning they parted.

* * * *

All this happened within the space of a year, but many years had passed away before I again visited the south, and came to Rome.

Then Don Salvatore was still living, a venerable white-haired old man, stricken in years. His beautiful Princess, whose person had become commanding and matronly, had again found peace and happiness, with the help of the Church and the good priest.

Filippo, with the fair daughter of a noble house whom he had made his wife, remained true to his art and himself. He possessed in Donna Speranza and his children new and beautiful models for the frescoes in the Loggie of the Roccaforte town palace, where he was illustrating in a series of delineations the history of his ancestors; for he no longer painted exclusively Christian legends, but had tried his hand at historical pictures with equally successful results.

Those of my readers who have been to Rome—and probably many of them have—will have seen the frescoes in the palace, and the beautiful Sposalizio in

the chapel, in which Wilfrid's face is immortalized, as Stella so earnestly wished.

Wilfrid did not stay long in England. He never breathed a word to anyone of what had passed between him and Lady Jane at Harbury Hall. He came back to live on the spot where he had loved, and where his love lay buried.

His house stands not far from the Villa Roccaforte. "The Englishman's house" the people call it, when the stranger notices the white walls and gables among the chestnut trees and asks who lives there. All the natives know it well. "The kind gentleman, *il generoso*, lives up there. Everyone who is in trouble or wants help, finds his way to him," they will tell you.

He comes into Rome very seldom, only for the great Church festivals, and associates with very few people besides the two princely families. At first, the priest was a regular guest in his house during the hot summer months. At last he died there, and ended his ministry on earth for ever.

Wilfrid, too, is an artist still, but he paints only her, his dead love. In all the Churches and Chapels

of the neighbourhood there are pictures of Stella painted by him, for the people to worship.

Don Salvatore has been dead a long, long time, but when I went back a year ago, I saw the Three again in the Villa Roccaforte, Prince Filippo and Adalbert with their children round them, and poor lonely Wilfrid. I was told that both he and the Princess were present at his mother's death, and that they had become reconciled at the last.

Time works wonders for us all, only it does not bring us back our dead; but they live on, in our memories, as Stella does in the hearts of the Three, and, for us all, in Filippo's undying masterpieces.

THE END.



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